HOLY
MISSION
DIVINE VISION

Sai Usha



PUBLISHING

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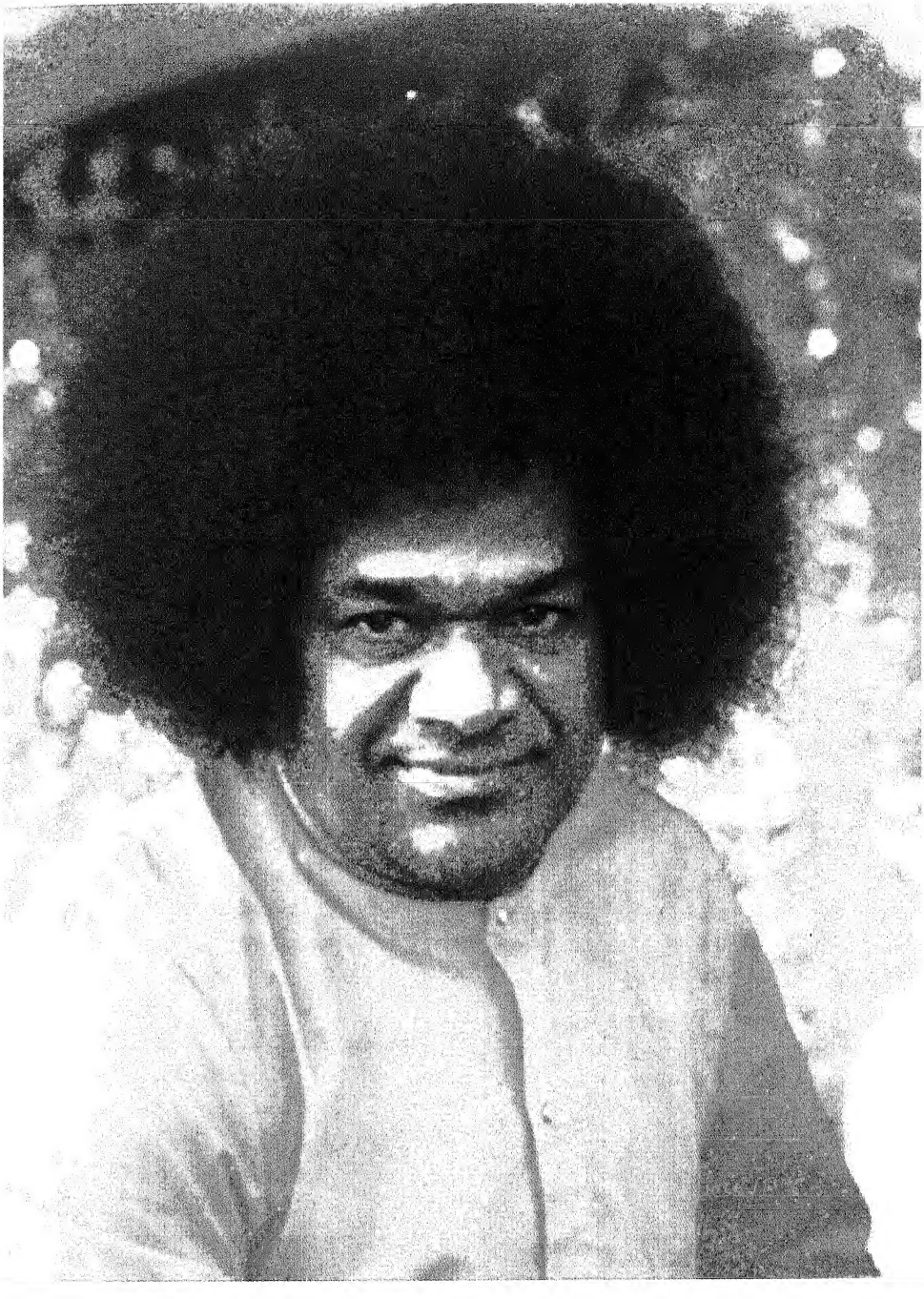
First Reprint, 1998

ISBN-81-86822-48-8

Published & Distributed by :
Sai Towers Publishing
(A Unit of Sri Sathya Sai Towers Hotels Pvt Ltd.)
3/497 Main Road
Prasanthi Nilayam - 515 134
INDIA
Tel : 91-8555-87880
Fax : 91-8555-87302
EMail : saitower@giasbg01.vsnl.net.in

Contact for Mail Order in U.S.A.
JAI SAI RAM
PO Box 900
Trinidad, CO 81082 U.S.A.
Phone : (719) 846-0846
Fax : (719) 846-0847
E-Mail : jaisairm @ ria.net
OR
jaisairm @ rmi.net

Printed by :
D.K. Fine Arts Press Pvt. Ltd.
New Delhi - 110 052



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DIVINE MESSAGE

"What you must develop is the VISION DIVINE,
An awakning of intuition most fine;
For you are really here on a HOLY MISSION-
That of discovering what you are, whence you came
from and whither you shall go".

- Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Dedication

I humbly lay this book at the Lotus Feet of our Beloved Lord Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I hereby promise to dedicate my life to His cause, the task of serving humanity.

Sai Usha.

FOREWORD

"Love All, Serve All"- *Baba*

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the God-Incarnate of the *Kaliyuga,* now familiarly known all over the world and universally acclaimed as an Apostle of Love and Peace, is the Saviour of the human race and the one and only hope for the redemption of the struggling and suffering humanity marching hastily towards their self-destruction and annihilation. He has assumed this slender human form in a remote obscure village amidst simple folks to fulfill His Divine Mission,just as Lord Krishna, the *Yogeswara,* chose to spend His childhood amongst the simple cattle-rearing folks of *Gokulam.* The numerous miracles that emanate from His tiny human form day in and day out, defying the laws of physical and biological sciences, are so spontaneous, thrilling and astonishing that even the most pragmatic scientists cannot but stand as silent witnesses with a sense of wonder. Such acts of the Divine Incarnation transcend the realm of wordly sciences and soar far higher into the unexplored regions of Metaphysics. Baba explains them away as 'His Visiting Cards' and describes them as manifestations of His Divine Will which can produce anything at any time and accomplish any task ordained by Him without any outside help.

The most admirable of all the miracles manifested by *Bhagawan* is His transformation of the individual because of His infinite capacity to penetrate into the depth of even the hardest of hard - hearted persons with His weapon of pure and unsullied Love and transform the person into an aspirant charged with love and devotion, ready to follow the righteous path shown by Him. As He Himself often says, He gives one what he or she wants, so that he or she will want what He has to give them for their own redemption! The uniqueness of *Bhagawan's* Love is reflected conspicuously in the learning faces of the hundreds of children that assemble for His Darshan everyday at *Prasanthi Nilayam,* when He fondles them with the tender care and affection that only a mother can bestow. He is always quite at home in their midst, with the result that these children prefer to stay at *Prasanthi Nilayam* even during vacation, under the loving care of *Bhagawan,* whose love is equal to that of a thousand mothers as proclaimed by Himself!

The book "HOLY MISSION - DIVINE VISION" brought out by our learned sister Smt.Sai Usha with utmost dedication and devotion presents the most valuable teachings of *Bhagawan Baba* in a novel and effective way in the form of questions by an inquisitive youth and answers given by a highly evolved teacher who is practising the tenets of the religion of Universal Love propounded by *Bhagawan Baba.*

She has delved deep into the ocean of *Baba's* teachings to select the pearls of wisdom springing from the Divine Heart and has made a beautiful garland of them to attract the children first and persons of all ages who can benefit by this.

She should be commended for having brought out the salient features of *Bhagawan's* extensive teachings on almost all aspects of the spiritual path covering *Karma, Jnana* and *Bhakthi Yogas* and the necessity for every human being to control the animal nature that often shows its head and march towards the stage of manifestation of the Divine Nature. The author has carefully selected quotations from *Bhagawan's* writings and discourses relevant to the particular aspects of the questions raised by the aspirant (which can be commonly heard in any gathering of spiritual seekers) and provided fitting answers to enlighten the student and clear his doubts.

The book makes interesting reading and is particularly suited to the students and young aspirants of the modern age who will acquire immense benefit from the masterly clarifications given for the common place misconceptions and misunderstandings about religion and spirituality that are prevalent to-day. It is not just one more addition to the many books that have already been published by the *Sri Sathya Sai* Books and Publications Trust, and others in India and abroad about Bhagawan's Life and Mission, but a valuable asset for the modern youth to help them to march towards the goal of Self-realisation in the path of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love, and Non-violence which are the pillars of *Sanathana Dharma* propounded by *Bhagawan.* May *Bhagawan* bestow His Divine Blessings on this enlightened author and also on the lucky readers who are fortunate to scan through this book.

Jai Sai Ram.

Maj Gen. S.P.Mahadevan, AVSM (Retd)
Central Co-ordinator (South Zone)
Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations
Tamilnadu

COMMENTARY

When Mrs. Sai Usha met me to give me a copy of her manuscript for this book entitled HOLY MISSION, DIVINE VISION, my first impression was that she was being perhaps over-enthusiastic about writing a book on a subject like this. I felt that, as a sincere devotee of *Shri Sathya Sai*, she could derive greater spiritual satisfaction by confining herself to meditation and prayers instead of attempting to write a book on a spiritual subject for which readership may be scarce anyway, besides taking the risk of developing an intellectual ego which may actually retard spiritual progress *'Satvaaahantaa mahaa-ahantaa budder drishtishu aatmaraktih'*. However, after hearing her further and going through her manuscript, I have been convinced that her urge to write this book is not due to an intellectual ego drive but due to a passionate devotional drive to share one's spiritual sentiments with fellow devotees, being instigated by the merciful Grace of *Satya Sai* Himself. This is seen clearly in the simplicity and fluency of her presentation, confined to ideas only of direct value especially to women and youth - caught helplessy in the stresses of an age driven by a heartlessly avaricious commerce and a thoughtlessly competitive industry striding mercilessly over the international boundaries of an ever shrinking world. The organisation of her book in the form of the discourses of a learned sage for the benefit of some young aspirants, who seek a relatively brief and simple summary of ethical values of purely spiritual basis, devoid of superstitious or obscurantist overlays, is indeed a clever mode which suits the purpose of the work very well and allows her to dwell only on those topics which may be of direct interest to ordinary folk, without in-depth learning of any religion or philosophy. I have, therefore, no hesitation in commending this book for perusal, especially by the women and youth of this country who are looking for a simple exposition of the rather complex national philosophy of India, namely *yoga*. Even the simplest of yogas, namely *Karma Yoga,* calls for the careful distinction between *karma* and *akarma* on the one hand and *karma* and *Vikarma* on the other, a process refered to as difficult, by *Bhagawan* Himself in the *Gita*. However, Mrs.Sai Usha's writing of this book and publishing it itself is a demonstration of *karma yoga* in action, as per the Lord's simple dictat: '*Karmanyeva adhikaraste*' which, in other

words, implies: '*Kartavyaiva matir yatra karmayogah pradrisyate*' -*karma yoga* is seen in action wherever any one concentrates one's mind on *Kartavya, kartum yogya iti*, one's duty as one sees it in a non-egoistic frame of mind.

I, therefore, congratulate Mrs.Sai. Usha for her courage and conviction in bringing out this volume as her own simple response to the inner urge for selfless service to humanity which Satya Sai is providing in various ways to his innumerable devotees in the world today and thereby propelling this world itself to betterment in peace and achievement. Needless to say, the blessings of Satya Sai will enlighten the minds and brighten the lives of all those who would get the chance to read this book. There is hence no better way of concluding this Foreword to a commendable publication inspired by Sri Satya Sai Baba than to record an obeissance to HIM and reinvoke His blessings on all mankind:

Vande Sivam saayinam satyaroopam
sarvaatmakam divyasiddhiprataapam
sarvesa-saamyam matasarvamitram
dayaaparam deenasurakshakam
Subhaabham

Prof.V.Seshadri
EE Department. IIT, Madras

PART I

THE QUEST

1. WHO, WHAT, WHY?

Man is not born merely in order to eat and sleep, earn his livelihood, spend his time in frivolous, pursuit of fun and enjoyment. He is not born in order to make merry and fritter away his life in idle pursuits. No man's advent on earth has an obscure aim. There is a more meaningful purpose, a more profound journey for man. He is here in order to realize the Highest Truth, the Greatest Wisdom. In fact, the entire life span of man should be search for the Truth, the quest of - "Who am I? What am I? Why am I?" These are the questions that fill the mind of every self-enquiring man and woman. Some time during his progress from the cradle to the grave, man begins to have at least a glimmering of the Truth.

When a child is born, it does not smile or rejoice. No, it cries. Its plaintive cries are proof of the fact that the child loathes to come into this harsh world. Can we not infer then that the child has left a much better realm, a happier and more charming place, in order to be born into this materialistic world? Why? Why is the child born? Did he ask to be born or is the reason some inexplicable law of the universe?

Again, why are some babies born into rich, highly educated families, and their unfortunate companions into miserable slums? Is it by a merely random selection or is there a law regarding their births? Then too, why is a child born to a particular set of parents? Was there a previous bond between them? Talking of 'previous bonds', has he had a previous birth? Does a person have just one birth or does he have many? What happens after death? Is there life after? Is there a rebirth? Are birth and death just accidental or incidental occurrences, or is there a law of the universe governing them and creating a chain? In fact, how did life occur? How did the universe, how did life first come into being? How were all living things created? Did it all just happen accidentally, did it happen scientifically, and can we attribute it all to a Higher Force? If the last is true, who or what is this Higher Force? Is it not a benevolent one, and not malevolent? Has it a form or is it formless? So many points are there to ponder. Are we content to merely sit back and lead the lives of just eaters, or do we wish to enquire, seek to discover the truth relating to our questions?

The great gifts to mankind is the enquiring mind. Why should man not spend his time then ruminating over reasons, pondering over points, reflecting upon causes, till he finds the solution? This quest of man, for the highest truth throughout the moment of his life time, is in fact, the story of mankind.

"Science asks the question, 'What' and the question 'How' and seeks to get the answers from the objective world of name and form; the world one can see, hear, taste, touch and smell; the world one can categorise through reason. But the science of the spirit asks the question 'Why'? For what purpose? It discovers that Maya is the answer for the Why. Go into the truth and you see the One behind the manifold. Brahman alone is the One, all else is the super-imposition of names and form upon its Sat-chit-ananda essence."

"The intellect must investigate, as far as it can, the fundamental problem, why this birth, whither this life, whence this adventure, what the effect of human actions is on this life and on future lives, etc. Consciousness must delve deep into the Divinity that underlies it."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

2. FROM THE CHILD TO THE MAN

Oh! What a glorious time is the period of infancy and later that of childhood .What great problems and sorrows does the baby have? Some colic perhaps or hunger or he cries for his mother or cries because he is wet. These, of course, seem very tragic to him, but in spite of everything, the basic nature is one of joy, of bliss. He is yet unaffected by the harsh realities and cruel tribulations of life, unsuspecting of the intrigues that abound in the world around him. He remains innocent, tranquil, unaffected.

When he slowly grows up and starts experiencing his first hardships, not everyone is as amicable to him as his parents. The child yonder will not give him that toy. The child in the seat next to him in the classroom tears his book and pinches him. Mother is busy with the new baby and although she is as loving as before, he somehow senses that he is no longer the 'apple of her eye', the centre of her world. So starts his initiation into the realities of life. It's no soft bed of roses - the roses have thorns, one slowly discovers. But, being wise one must learn to adjust.

Gone are the tender years. Gone are the innocent years. He is now a strapping adolescent, full of doubts and problems, full of complexes, all mixed up, and hurdles. Still, with loving guidance from his parents and teachers, he overcomes these hurdles and slowly grows out of adolescence into radiant adulthood.

What is next in line? A good job, then marriage, then come children. One is now a proud and happy father himself. Then he works hard and climbs up the ladder, rung after rung, to name and fame.

One may have all the comforts and luxuries that money can buy. At fifty, he has a loving wife, two wonderful children, and a beautiful home filled with all sorts of comforts and luxuries a car, a colour TV, a refrigerator and all the gadgets and appliances that the modern man considers indispensable for his happiness.

Why, in that case, is his hand stretching out, slowly but inexorably, towards that bottle of tranquilisers? Why is he finding it increasingly difficult to sleep at night? What is the cause of that nagging unease at the back of his mind? Why does he have the feeling of having missed

out on something important in life? He feels cheated, he sometimes even feels a sense of 'unfulfillment' (If you will forgive me for using that non-existent but highly expressive word). Why? What is lacking in his life? What is he searching for now? Let's try to delve into the mind and see.

"Man was given a body and mind through which he perceives the finite world and identifies himself with it. But man is neither the body not the mind; his nature is spirit, the immortal soul. As often as he tries to find permanent happiness through his sensory perceptions, so often his hopes, his enthusiasm, his desires are shipwrecked on the rocks of deep frustration and disappointment. Everything in the material universe is essentially ephemeral and ever changing. That which is subject to change carries with it the seeds of disappointment. And so it is that our ship of worldly expectations sooner or later runs aground on the shoals of disillusionment."

Sri Sri Daya Mata
Yogoda Satsanga Society of India
Self-Realization Fellowship

3. THE SEARCH

And so, one man begins his search. He has been missing out on something vital and he now begins to search for it. But, where should he start to search? Within his family, his neighbourhood, in some *ashram* or within himself? He begins to ask questions of all and sundry, but alas! No one is able to answer him. Some even think that he is beginning to go crazy and start avoiding him. A feeling of frustration fills him and threatens to overpower him. What should he do? Where should he search? Who will help and guide him?

When this problem beset man today, his recourse is to drink; he took to drinking and tried to drown his problems in alcohol. In a vain attempt to find peace of mind, some do start to take drugs and finally become hopeless addicts. Some are of a different type. A good athlete, so he jogged and ran himself into tired slumber and blissful oblivion. Some do neither of these things. They are so earnest in their quest that the *guru* had to come to them.

Prashant was strolling along one evening after dinner when he met an acquaintance who casually mentioned that there would be a spiritual discourse by Swami - in the playground opposite his home the next evening. Thanks, the man walked on.

That night, he debated within himself. Should he or should he not attend this lecture? What did he know of Swamijis after all? All that he knew was that they went about in long ochre robes, professing to have renounced all their worldly possessions! A couple of them he had discovered to be cheats too. No, he would not even dream of demeaning himself by attending a lecture given by such a 'rogue.!'

The next evening, however, he found himself drawn like a magnet to the playground. He sat, a puzzled and lonely figure, awaiting the *Swami's* arrival. The *Swami* arrived, and after a short prayer began his talk. The topic was *Bhakthi Yoga.* As the teacher talked, he listened spellbound to the sweet words pouring out from the Swami's lips and to his moving descriptions of the desperate plight of a devotee whose love for Lord Krishna was so great that the Lord Himself appeared in order to save him. Prashant began to think. Was there really a Lord of the Universe then? And was he really as merciful, and as kind, as the *Swamiji* made him out to be? He must simply find out. After the hour-

long lecture was over, he went to the *Sadhu*, and he who had never prostrated himself before anyone, now fell headlong at the feet of the holy man. The *Swamiji* gently lifted him up. "What is it you want, dear one?" he tenderly asked. "I am utterly beset by this problem", Prashant replied. "My mind is full of doubts and fears. Who am I? What is life? What is its meaning and purpose? Is there really a God? An Omnipotent, Omniscient One like you said there is? Everything bewilders me and baffles me. I long to know the truth. Help me, Oh! learned one."

The holy man smiled kindly at him and said, "Dear one! Truth cannot be revealed to you in a day. Come to my lectures everyday and after each talk, open your heart out to me and speak out all your doubts. I shall endeavour to answer them. During the course of these talks, you may find some peace of mind."

So, he attend the *Swamiji's* discourses. Each day found him more eager than he was the previous day. He would race home from work, bathe and dress and rush to the playground in order to sit in the front row at the *Swami's* feet. Slowly a deep peace started to pervade his mind, he became quiet and happy. In the tranquil waters of his mind, he began to perceive a faint glimmering of light.

"Faith will come only if you develop hunger for God. A man who does not feel hunger will not relish a feast."

-Sri Sathya Sai Baba

4. QUESTIONS ASKED AND ANSWERED

Every evening Prashant sat at the *Swami's* feet and listened to his discourses. This continued for over a fortnight. Then suddenly, one day, at the conclusion of his lecture, the *Swamiji* beckoned to Prashant. "Come now , sit by me and ask me questions to your heart's content," he said lovingly. A sense of exhaltation filled Prashant. Now, at long last, had come the opportunity for which he had been waiting, all his life perhaps. He folded his palms together reverentially and said, "Thank you *Swami*, for your gracious permission and kindness. I am indeed greatly indebted to you. My first and foremost question is-"

"Is there really a God? If so, why did He create this entire universe, this whole stage? Who are we? What is the purpose behind all this?"

The Swami smiled. "The answer for that is very simple, yet profound, young man. There always was, is, and always will be the Omniscient Being, namely God. There was no time when He was not - nor will there be a time when He shall not exist. He has been there since the beginning of time. As to why He has created this universe with all the living beings -'tis His Own Divine Drama, His Leela, His Play. Listen, take it this way - that God was bored and lonely. So, He created us all to play with. The universe is His stage and we are the actors. He takes great delight in moving us up and down the stage. However, every game has to have its rules, do's and don'ts, in order to make it interesting. So also, God laid down certain rules for His great Cosmic Play, and now, He Himself is bound by them. His rule is very simple - that of Karma which I shall explain to you at a much later stage. In simple words, it is much the same as Newton's Law - every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Let me modify that law into - every action has an equal and opposite reaction, resound and reflection. In other words, "What you sow, so shall you reap." This is the law governing the universe. In fact, the whole concept of destiny, suffering and joy and of rebirth, is built up around this law. I shall explain this to you in greater detail when we talk about *karma.*

"I hope your question has been answered to a certain extent at least. Think over what I've told you and we will discuss it again tomorrow if you like. Now, what's your next question?"

Prashant said, "Holy One, what is our connection with God, what is our relationship with Him?"

Swami - Have you ever seen the mighty ocean? Yes? And then have you examined a drop of water? Well, the former is a mighty and vast expanse - endless, and the latter is but a tiny drop. But the nature of both is the same. The drop has come from the ocean and, later, it will go back into the ocean from which it came; that is to say, it will merge into the ocean at some time or the other. Similarly, we too came from God and at some time or the other, will go back to Him and merge in Him. The whole purpose of life is to realize this and the aim should be to perfect ourselves, so that we become worthy to merge. That is the purpose of life.

You wish to know the relationship between God and the individual being? Well, God is the Universal Soul or the *Paramatma* and we are the individual souls or the *Jivatmas*. The relationship is like that of the child to the parent who has given it birth and life. Now, you are a biologist, aren't you? So let me explain it this way. Imagine a parent cell. This cell gives forth dozens of tiny new cells. These cells separate from the parent cell. But the parent cell still manages to keep contact with the daughter cells by means of an invisible linking thread. Through this thread, it continues to keep some sort of control over the daughter cells. The daughter cells, however, are free to move about as they like. But when they get lost or go astray, the parent cell may or may not pull them back with a jerk. This thin thread also acts as a sort of telephone wire sending messages between the parent cell and the daughter cells. The parent cell or the master also has a sort of radar system by which it can keep tabs on all the daughter cells.

Now the parent cell is God and the daughter cells are the innumerable living beings. The invisible thread is the link between God and the living being and the telephone wire transmitting messages is our conscience. When we do something wrong, God tells us and warns us through this telephone wire or conscience.

Another way of looking at the whole thing is to imagine God as a Master Computer. We are all tiny cogs and He is controlling all of us. The computer has all the data of our actions, whether they are right ones or wrong in its memory. So, very logically and justly, we get what is due to us. If we have done wrong we reap unhappy results, and if we have been good, we reap only beneficial and happy ones. That is God's Law of the Universe.

To sum up, God is the Supra-soul or the Primary Soul or the *Param-atma* multiplying into millions of individual souls or *Jivatmas*. These *Jivatmas* are all parts of the *Paramatma.* It stands to reason then that we are all sparks of the Divinity, all children of God - that we ourselves are Divine. I hope that this has cleared some of your confusion, young man. Shall we continue this tomorrow? It's getting late now.

The next day found Prashant back at the Swami's feet, more eager than ever.

Prashant - *Swami,* granted that there definitely is a God, a Supreme Being, a Lord of the universe, what are His characteristics? What is His Nature? Can you describe Him? Can any one get to know Him?

Swami - God is Omniscient. He sees everything. He is Omnipresent. He is present everywhere, on land, in air, in water, in ether. There is no place where He is not. He cannot be seen, that is true, as He has no form, but highly evolved people are able to perceive Him and realize Him through their evolved or raised consciousness. God is pure consciousness. He can be experienced, although for that a great deal of *sadhana* is essential. By *sadhana,* I mean endeavour, effort. We shall talk about that later. Sometimes though, the formless God assumes form and is born on earth as man. The nature of God is Bliss - He is ever blissful-*Anada Swaroopa.* His nature is Truth - *Sathyam.* He is *chit* - consciousness. Hence He is known as *Sath-chit-ananda*-Truth, Consciousness, Bliss. He is also *Agamya* deeper than the deep, fathomless. He is *Nirakara* - formless, but also *Sakara (with* form) when He assumes form. He is *Nirguna* - above all attributes or qualities, *Saguna* when He takes form as man and has to pretend to feel emotions like anger or pity. He is above the three *gunas* - I'll refer to those at a later date.

Prashant - Why does God take birth as man? What is the necessity for that?

Swami - From time to time ,God incarnates on earth as a human being. He does so for many reasons. The first is to answer the pleas of His pious devotees who cry and clamour for Him. They call and He comes. The second is to destroy the evil prevalent in society and to restore righteousness. Let me quote a Great Being here. "I came because the good men of the world, the saintly, the wise, the sages and the guides and the Godly longed for Me".

"Whenever there is the fading of the *Dharma* and the uprising of unrighteousness, then, I ease Myself forth into birth. For the deliverance

of the good , for the destruction of the evil doers, for the enthroning of the right, I am born from age to age".

Prashant - Who has quoted that, *Swami*?

Swami -It is Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I'll tell you about Him at a more befitting time.

Prashant- HasGgod incarnated on earth many times before? What are the different incarnations?

Swami- So far there have been Ten Incarnations or *Avatars*. We call them the *Dashavatar*.

5. DASHAVATAR

These ten *Avatars* are the *Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha,* and *Kalki.* The Lord took the form of a fish, a tortoise, a boar, Narasimha (half man, half lion), and a dwarf to save *dharma* and protect it from evil doers. He incarnated as Rama to kill the demon Ravana. Rama, the King of Ayodhya, was a strict adherent of *Dharma* and *Sathya.* In order to fulfil his father's promise to his stepmother, he gave up throne and kingdom and went into the forest, where he lived for fourteen years. In order to uphold righteousness, he even sent away his wife Sita, although he knew her to be blameless. He was a model son, a most loving husband, an affectionate brother, and a great and dedicated ruler. He set a shining example to the entire world, not just for that era (the *Threta Yuga*) but for eras to come.

In the *Dwapara Yuga,* the Lord incarnated as Krishna. Krishna was the very epitome of love. Whoever saw Him, loved Him. He showed the pathway to God through love. The *Gopas* and *Gopis* of Brindavan were simple cowherds and maidens, but they loved Krishna with a love that was selfless and sublime. They are held up even today as shining examples of pure, untainted and sublime love. The *Bhagavdgita* or the Song of God was the *Upadesh* given by Lord Krishna to His friend and brother-in-law Arjuna on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra.* The *Gita* as told by Krishna teaches *Dharma, Nishkama Karma* and *Vairagya* or detachment. Krishna stressed on *dharma* or the duties of man. Man has to follow his *Swadharma* - namely the *dharma* that he was born to. For example, it is the duty of a *Kshatriya* or a soldier to fight; for him, it would be no sin to kill on the battlefield. Outside the battleground, however, killing would be as taboo to him as to anyone else. The *guru's* duty would be to teach, guide and advise; he would not be called upon to sell in shops or to plough the fields.

Nishkama Karma means to serve others selflessly, without expecting any reward or praise. *Vairagya* means detachment; detachment from the sense objects of the world, doing your duty and giving love to family and friends without getting deeply involved in them,without getting affected by either criticism or praise from them.

6. TRIPLE INCARNATION

The next evening, the *Swamiji* began to talk to Prashant about the *Sai Baba Avatar*. "Long ago", said he, "in the year 1858, a young *Fakir* suddenly came to Shirdi (in Maharashtra) along with a wedding procession. No one knew who he was or his parentage. They did not even know if he was Hindu or Muslim. The *Fakir* first attracted attention when he mysteriously traced the missing horse of a muslim named Abdullah. Abdullah looked into the *Fakir's* eyes, saw flames of light dancing within them and sat entranced. He saw that a beautiful glow had suffused the *Fakir's* face. Moreover, the *Fakir* seemed to know Abdullah's name and all about him. Abdullah was convinced that he was in the presence of a truly Divine Person.

Slowly, the *Fakir's* magnetic personality, strange mannerisms and miraculous powers began to attract many followers. Many a sick person was cured by him - a blind man regained his lost sight, a leper was rid of the dreaded disease, and many a cripple was able to walk again. Apart from that, people flocked to hear the *Fakir's* teachings. The holy man used to behave in a very strange manner. He would go into a temple and start reciting the Koran, march into a mosque and chant *Vedic* hymns. Under His influence, however, Hindus and Muslims became united. His followers were thus a mixed congregation.

The *Fakir* declared Himself to be Sai Baba and told one of His devotees that eight years after leaving His earthly body, He would return again. In 1918, Sai Baba of Shirdi attained *Mahasamadhi.*

Eight years later, in 1926, Easwaramma of Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, gave birth to a son, Sathya Narayana Raju. Strange phenomena accompanied the birth of the babe. Musical instruments twanged by themselves, the tabla played by itself and all onlookers were filled with a strange wonder. When the baby was a few days old, a cobra was found at the head of His bed, with its hood spread out, but not harming the child.

From a tender age, Sathya proved to be an uncommon child. He became the favourite of family and friends. At school, He would dip His fingers into an empty bag and pull out sweets, pencils, rubbers, and flowers which He would present to His friends in great glee, much to their delight. When He was eight years old, He formed a *Bhajan* group

You may have heard of Buddha. Born a prince of a great royal dynasty, he renounced all his worldly possessions and even his family and went in search of truth and peace. He finally found *Nirvana* or enlightenment sitting under a *Bodhi* tree in Gaya. The Buddha preached *Ahimsa* or non-violence towards all living creatures. About the *Kalki Avatar*, no one is very sure. People are of divided opinion. Some believe that He is yet to come at the end of this era, the *Kali Yuga.* The ancient *rishis* had depicted *Kalki* as a man riding a white horse. Another school of thought believes him to have already come to earth, as a Triple Incarnation, firstly as Sai Baba of Shirdi, then the present Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi, and that lastly, He will come again as Prema Sai of Mandya, Karnataka. Not everyone will agree about this, however.

Prashant - Who is this Sai Baba, *Swamiji*?

Swami - That would be too much for me to narrate today. Shall we talk about it tomorrow? Meanwhile, I'd like to mention one more thing. Not all the *Avatars* were full or complete *Avatars* or *Poorna Avatars.* The *Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha* and *Vamana Avatars* came to earth for a short period of an hour or perhaps a day in order to fulfil their tasks. They were not *Poorna Avatars*. Buddha, although he lived for a whole life time, was not a *Poorna Avatar,* because he did not possess all the sixteen kalas or attributes or characteristics that a *Poorna Avatar* has to have. Parasurama had only one *kala*. As such, even Rama was not a *Poorna Avatar*. He possessed only twelve attributes, the others being shared by His three brothers and Parasurama. Krishna was born endowed with all the sixteen *kalas*, so he was a *Poorna Avatar*. The devotees of Sai Baba believe that He is a *Poorna Avatar:* that all the three Sai's are full *Avatar;* each Incarnation being complete in itself. I'll tell you tomorrow about the Sai Incarnations.

Prashant thanked the *Swamiji*, touched his feet and left.

7. SADHANA, THE PATHWAY TO GOD

Prashant- *Swami*, the other day you spoke about *Sadhana*. What exactly does that mean?

Swamiji- *Sadhana* means a form of discipline, a sort of training, a set of exercises. If you want to become a great athlete you have to undergo a rigorous training. Do pull-ups, exercise, jogging, etc. A commando also receives strenuous training. Similarly, in order to make progress on the spiritual path, certain disciplines, certain procedures have to be followed.

Prashant - What are they, *Swami*?

Swami - Well, there are different kinds of *Sadhana*. Suppose you wish to find God through *seva* or service. Make up your mind to live only for others; live every day only in order to serve others. Let "Love all, serve all" be your motto. Dedicate your entire life to the service of others. Serve selflessly, without thought of personal aggrandisement, gain, name or fame. From morning till night, let your entire thoughts and actions be suffused with that one goal - helping others. Your *Sadhana* then would mean forgetting self, putting others first, yourself last. Manav ki seva hi Madhav ki seva hai, if you understand Hindi. It means serving humanity is like serving God.

Anther way of realising God would be through *Jnana* or knowledge. This is a difficult path to tread. For this, you need to curb the wayward, monkey mind, control the senses and fix the wavering attention on your objective, namely God. For this, you must practice rigorous discipline, like getting up very early each morning, during the hours of the *Brahma Muhurtam* (between 3 and 6 am), sitting for *dhyanam* or meditation and fixing your mind on God. This path is fraught with difficulties, for many an obstacle comes in the way of your *dhyanam*. Also it is one of the most difficult things in the world to keep the mind blank and free from all idle thoughts and to concentrate on one object alone. Secondly, you have to practice *'Indriyanigraham' or* the control of the senses. For this, you have to eat only *sathwic* food and follow other strict disciplines. All this may not be feasible for a householder or for a man who has to do a lot of touring in his profession or for a busy, dedicated doctor.

The easiest path of finding God is through love - giving love to the Lord wholeheartedly and unreservedly, giving love not only to the Lord, but to all those around you, loving, loving, loving all the time. When you truly love God, you will automatically start loving all those around you, for they are but reflections of God. If you love your daughter, you will feel some emotion for her photograph too, won't you? Though not in the same measure, for the reproduction can never be equal to the original. So, let your motto be- 'Start the day with love, fill the day with love, and end the day with love. This is the way to God".

I have briefly touched upon the three pathways to God, although I have not given you definite names for them. They are, in fact, *Karma Marga, Jnana Marga* and *Prema* or *Bhakthi Marga.* These are the three different pathways to God. You may choose any of the routes. They all lead to the same goal, it is merely a question of personal preference or ability. You may even combine the three. For instance, you can tread the path of *seva* or *karma*, holding *jnana* in one hand and *bhakthi* with the other. Well, I shall talk to you in greater detail about the three margas some other time. In any case, I shall be touching upon these topics in the discourses that I shall be giving next week. You may derive some benefit from them.

Prashant- Thank you so much, *Swami.* I am so grateful to you for all the help you are giving me spiritually.

Swami- Yes, spiritually. Spiritual hunger is what one must have if one wishes to find God. Unless there is some slight curiosity, some hunger or some thirst for knowledge, one will not even feel the slightest interest in finding the truth. Even the slighest spark of curiosity is enough to set him on the spiritual path. I shall be speaking on spiritual hunger tomorrow. Do come and bring your family and friends too.

The next day found Prashant and his family and friends occupying the entire front row in the playground, eagerly awaiting the *Swami's* discourse.

"The best sadhana is to behave as you do, when you get a parcel of books by post. To get at the books, you unwrap the parcel and throw off the material used to pack the books. Now take the prayer that is the deepest and the most significant- "I want peace". Unwrap the layer 'I' or ego and the layer 'want'. Then you get peace. So, throw away the packing and hold on to the thing packed and protected"

-Sri Sathya Sai Baba

PART II

THE SWAMI'S DISCOURSES

8. SEEK YE THE KINGDOM OF GOD

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all other things shall be added unto you." -Jesus Christ.

Swami started his talk as usual with the invocation to Lord Ganesha. Then he plunged straight away in the heart of his topic.

Man is born to die and ultimately find his way back to his Creator. Each one of us at some time or the other in our lives, feels the stirrings of the pangs of spiritual hunger, a deep thirst and quest for the knowledge of the truth, and an inexplicable longing for union with the Divine. This spiritual hunger is deep-rooted and emerges as the culmination of the merits accrued in past births. It is the fountain head of all spiritual activity. Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi has said- "Spiritual hunger is the ultimate meaning of every activity in life. The dissatisfaction and the restlessness that remain even after obtaining all the necessities of life, show that everyone consciously or unconsciously suffers from spiritual hunger and it is not appeased until the spirit within is realised. Without this divine discontent, there is no real progress."

God knows our past, present and future. He knows the merits and demerits, the debits and credits of our past lives. He knows exactly at which point in our lives, He should touch the spring of spiritual hunger and release the fountain of yearning and longing into the stress of our lives. When the time is ripe, He calls us to Him and allows us to fulfil our yearning and assuage our longing, by enabling us to drink at the ocean of His Divine Love and Compassion. This, He showers on us in endless profusion. "Come, take *Ananda* from Me, dwell on that *Ananda* or Bliss and be full of Shanthi or peace". So saying He allows us to drink at His fount and imbibe His bliss-giving nectar.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all other things shall be added unto you", said Jesus Christ. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa said, "Men shed a jugful of tears for children or wife or money. But who weeps for God?" As long as the child remains engrossed with toys, the mother is busy doing her household duties. When the child gets tired of its toys, throws them aside and cries for its mother, then the mother comes in haste and takes the child in her arms. You behave likewise towards God, and He will reveal Himself to you.

"If you take just one step towards Me, I shall take a hundred towards you." Thus said Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi. God is eager for your love, He is longing for your devotion. Take but one step towards Him and He will welcome you with open arms. In His wonderful Mercy, He will reveal Himself to you in all His full Glory and fill you with joy and peace. So, begin right from today, nay, start this very moment your journey towards God.

God is like a shy child. Unless He is convinced that you are really longing for Him, yearning for Him, pining for Him, He will not reveal Himself to you.

Why are you so engrossed in wordly activities? Why have you turned so materialistic, so greedy for the sense objects in life? This *Kali Yuga* is the age of rampant materialism, cynical disbelief, strident fanfare and senseless strife, mingled with a curious fear and anxiety. In such a world, man is engaged in the blind pursuit of fleeting sensory pleasures, thereby frittering away his precious time and energy. He spends his life in feverish haste, trying to grasp at rainbows, constantly in search of joy, fame, power and wealth. And thus he persists in the vain pursuit of glory, until he becomes mentally, emotionally and spiritually a cripple. In the final act of despair, disappointment and disillustionment with the material world, he turns, at long last, in abject misery and frustration to God and discovers, to his great wonder and joy, that all he had been seeking in his life was within his reach all the while. So why do you senselessly knock at the doors of cinema halls, night clubs and such like, seeking vainly for joy? Why not knock at your own front door and see? Why don't you, one evening, walk away from your house to the front gate, then briskly approach your house again, knock at the door, open it and see how you feel? Won't you feel that the place you have been seeking, the comforts you have been striving for are all there in your own house itself? Yes, they have been there all the while, in your own home, on the front porch, in your own backyard! Only, you haven't realized it, "Seek and ye shall find." Start searching for God and I shall give you guarantee in full measure that you shall find Him. Have you heard of Sri Sri Daya Mata? Well, she is a disciple of Sri Paramahamsa Yogananda of *Yogada Satsanga* Society of India. She once said the following - "The trouble is, we do not have enough faith in the Divine words: 'Seek ye God first' then all other things will be added unto you. 'You have to start with believing and then, eventually, if you go on seeking Him, you will suddenly say: 'My goodness! All that I'd wanted, I feel I have. I have not missed anything.'"

Once we seek and find Him, we learn to transfer our attachment from the worldly to the Godly. Where before, we found it difficult to give up worldly desires, now we find it impossible to give up God. Sri Paramahamsa Yogananda said "If you just once get a glimpse of the Divine Mother, you will forsake all lesser desires and ambitions. You will feel no wish for anything else." There will soon come the time when you will see God everywhere and in everything; there will come the time when you start the day with thoughts of God, fill the day with thoughts of God and end it with thoughts of Him. My beloved children, I bless you that you may soon reach this stage."

Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi.

"Why should we seek God? What is God? How can we find Him? The first question can be answered very simply. We should seek God because we are made in His image and only His perfection and permanency can give us lasting happiness.

Everything in the material universe is essentially ephemeral and ever changing. That which is subject to change carries within it the seeds of disappointment. And so it is that our ship of worldly expectations, sooner or later, runs aground on the shoals of disillusionment. Therefore we should seek God, because He is the fountain head of all wisdom, all love, all bliss, all contentment. God is the source of our being, the source of all life. And we are made in His image. When we find Him, we will realize this truth"

Sri Sri Daya Mata in her book *Only Love*

9. THE THREE MARGAS - KARMA MARGA

Swami - "My dear children, yesterday I spoke to you about spiritual hunger and the importance of seeking God. But you may have started to wonder, just how to do that. How does one go about seeking God, you may well ask, my children. Well, the ancient *rishis*, the wise sages of yore had systematically chalked out a plan. They had discovered a three-fold path to God and they gave these paths names. It's just like a '*Triveni Sangam*'. All the three roads will meet at one point - the destination, namely God. Now let me tell you clearly about the three Margas or pathways, roads or routes. They are the *Karma, Jnana* and *Bhakthi Margas*. Perhaps you remember that I have already touched upon these three margas in a previous lecture. Let me talk on *Karma Marga* today.

The lay man understands the word '*Karma*' to mean just fate. When something unpleasant happens to him, he says, "That is my *karma*, my fate". Alright, that is one meaning of the term, the lay meaning. But the more important meaning is 'Action'. It means the path of *seva* or *service*. Karma marga means, therefore, the path of seva or service. Karma marga means therefore, the pathway to God through selfless service to others. This is very dear to God. Serve suffering humanity, aid the needy, help the hungry and homeless and God will be most pleased with you and will shower His Blessings and bounteous Grace on you. A word of caution here. The type of *karma* you should practise is *Nishkama Karma,* that is selfless service. Do not ask for or expect any reward or praise, prize or benefit - either material or spiritual. Just serve others for the sake of serving them because you feel love for them, feel compassion for their suffering. Today, great many rich men go about endowing orphanages and old homes with vast sums of money, in the hope that their names will be published in the newspapers. They build temples hoping that their names will be carved on the foundation stone. No, this is not real *karma* or *seva* at all. This is selfish service, done only for personal reward, name and fame. Better then, that they do not perform any service at all. I am not saying that it is wrong to give donations to charitable organisations, orphanages and such like.

Do so by all means, but remain anonymous - don't let your name appear in public - in newspapers or anywhere else.

nother important aspect of selfless service is '*Karma phala thyaga*' -the giving up of the fruits of your actions to God. Perform the actions, the deeds conscientiously and painstakingly, but leave the fruits or the consequences of your actions in God's capable hands. Even when you wish to seek God, seek diligently, seek keenly and sincerely, but leave the result of even this action to Him. He knows best when and how to reward you, when to reveal Himself before you, He knows everything. This lesson of *Nishkama karma* and *Karmaphala thyaga,* is, in fact, one of the most important points told by Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita.*

I therefore warn all aspirants to this *marga* - do so, without any selfish motive or thought of personal gain, serve others selflessly. Spend your whole day, in fact, your entire life in the service of others. Let your entire thoughts be suffused with the idea of selflessly serving society. The feeling of joy that you derive from the various acts of *seva*, the great satisfaction and the tranquillity will in themselves be ample reward. Persevere, persevere, in this task, my dear friends, and surely you will one day be successful in reaping your richly deserved reward by realizing God.

Let me end my talk with two quotations from Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi.- "Work in the spirit of love, it leads you to worship, that is to say, work without regard to the proportion of benefit you derive from it. Work, since it is your duty, since you love to work, since that is the way you can offer God your gratitude for the skills He has endowed you with".

"Engage in *Karma* under the shadows of *Dharma*, practice *Dharma* with the awareness of *Brahma*. March along the path of *Karma* and reach *Dharmakshetra* where Brahma- realisation awaits.

Hari Aum Tat Sat

"These days, the biggest Temple & Mosque & Gurudwara is a place where man works for the good of mankind."

-Jawaharlal Nehru

"The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted; let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion."

-Swami Vivekananda

10. JNANA MARGA

Swami - "My dear children, yesterday, I spoke to you about *Karma Marga.* Today, I'd like to talk on *Jnana.*"

As you all know, the meaning of the word *'Jnana'* is knowledge. From the time man is born into this world, until the time he leaves it, man is always learning something. You have knowledge of so many things, don't you? You have knowledge of your birth to your parents, you know your family lineage, you have read a lot on astronomy, on the sun, the moon, the stars, you have a Ph.D. in science, you are an expert on Newton's laws, Principle of Archimedes and Einstein's theory; you may even be a mathematical genius - another Shakunthala Devi and so on. What is all this knowledge about? It's about the external world and the objects in it. But do you know your inner self? Do you even know who you are? Yes, of course, you are the son of so and so, but who are you really? Where did you come from and where will you go after you leave this world? You have now realised that there is an all pervading Force called God, which has created this universe, which has created you and all other living beings and things, but who is this God, where is He, what is His relationship to you? Well, each one of us, every aspirant to the *Jnana Marga,* must delve into the deepest recesses of his mind and find out.

Well, the *Jnana marga* to God is the pathway by which you reach God by first realising who He is and who you are and the relationship between the two. Many people may have this Knowledge in theory, having read about it in many *Vedantic* books, but how many can actually put it into practice?

From the beginning of time, man has been constantly crying '*Koham*', 'Who am I'? The answer for this is '*Soham*' - 'I AM HE'. Each one of us is a tiny fragment, a minute particle of the Almighty God. Just as tiny drops of water go to make the mighty ocean, as minute grains of sand form the vast desert, so also, all of us living beings put together make up the Omnipotent, Almighty God. We can take God or the *Paramatma* to be the sum total of all the individual souls or *Jivatmas* put together. If the great desert is Divine then each grain of sand too is Divine, isn't it ? So too, just as God is Divine, we too, as sparks of Him, are Divine. Only, we do not realise this and are blinded

by a veil of *Maya* (illusion) and are embroiled and enmeshed in the coils of evil qualities like *Kama, Krodha, Madha* and *Lobha* (passion, anger arrogance and greed). If we tear asunder this veil of Maya, rip away the evil qualities of *Kama, Krodha, Madha,* and *Lobha,* we will begin to discover the Divinity within.

Each time we take a breath, our breath is calling out 'Soham, Soham', 'I am He, I am He'. Only we, foolish as we are, do not realise this. How can we begin to realize this? What should we do about it?

Well, we can do this by intense *Sadhana* or *Tapas.* I have already talked to you on *Sadhana* earlier. I must warn you that the *sadhana* of one aspiring to *Jnana* is fraught with difficulties. It means withdrawal of the mind from the sense objects, rigorously disciplining it and bringing it under control, then fixing it on the goal, namely God. For all this, strenuous and vigorous training is essential. There is a great deal you ought to know about this training. I shall endeavour to give you a few hints.

First of all, make it a habit to get up very early in the morning keeping in mind the proverb "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Get up during the hours of the *Brahma Muhurtham* (3 - 6 a.m). This is considered to be the time of Brahma, and as such most auspicious. After brushing your teeth, washing your face, etc., sit down for *Dhyanam* or meditation in your *puja* or shrine room if you have one. If you don't, then allot a secluded place, a peaceful spot for that purpose. It can even be outdoors. Only it should have privacy. Keep in mind one factor - do not keep changing the place and do not sit for *dhyanam* at a different hour each day. If you do so, you will not be able to concentrate. Try to sit at the same time every day. This is most important. Sit facing either East or West, never sit facing North or South. You wish to know the reason? Well, just as the earth has a magnetic field running from North to South, it also has a spiritual field running from East to West. So when you sit for *dhyanam*, always sit along the spiritual current, that is East-West. If you sit against it like North-South, you may develop problems like headaches etc. And after all, concentration is what you are striving for, aren't you? Secondly, never sit on the bare ground, but on a mat or cushion and cover yourself with a woolen shawl if possible. This is in order to insulate yourself from the earth's currents.

Now, sit in the *Padmasana* pose, or if you cannot manage that ,at least sit cross-legged. Sit straight, with spine erect. Place your hands

on your knees, palms facing upwards, fingers in the *Chinmudra.* Let me here tell you about the *Chinmudra.* You bend the index finger, bring its tip into contact with the tip of the thumb, the whole making an ellipsoid. The significance is like this; the thumb signifies *Paramatma* and the index finger, the *Jivatma.* You bend or bow the *Jivatma* and bring it into contact with the *Paramatma.*

This in fact symbolises the whole meaning of *Dhyanam* itself, *Jivatma* finding contact with the *Paramatma.* The ellipsoidal shape of the *Chinmudra* suggests the Law of the universe itself - man emerging from God and then merging back into Him.

So much about your sitting posture. Now close your eyes and relax. You are now ready for *dhyanam.* On the actual techniques of *dhyanam,* I shall talk tomorrow, as there is no time now.

Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi.

TWO KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

There is a dialogue in the Upanishads between Brahma (the Creator) and Narada.

Once sage Narada went to Brahma to take initiation from Him. Brahma told him to come on the following day. Accordingly, the sage went to Brahma on the next day, with a big pile of books. The Creator asked him why he had brought the books, to which Narada replied that he wanted to show Brahma all that he already knew. At this, Brahma laughed and said, "Narada, you are a very foolish man. There are two types of knowledge. One is empirical or bookish knowledge, such as history, geography, astrology and chemistry. The other is called transcendental or spiritual knowledge. Which one are you coming to me for? The sage replied that he had come for spiritual knowledge. Brahma informed him, "Spiritual knowledge cannot be gained through books. You must experience it yourself." Narada asked how he could experience it. Then Brahma initiated him and said- "Just sit down quietly and forget all that you have learned."

11. DHYANAM

Swamiji - "Dear ones, I told you yesterday how to adopt the correct pose for *dhyanam*. The actual *dhyanam* itself is of many types. You can do light meditation, sound meditation or *manthra japam* or *Kundalini* meditation. There is also Transcendental Meditation (TM) so popular with Westerners. Of all these, light meditation or meditation on light is by far the easiest and most suitable for beginners.

Well children, God is effulgence. He is light, He is radiance. He is *Paramjyothi*. So, let's try and visualize God in the form of light. Have a small lamp or *jyothi* or candle in front of you. Behind that, you may have the picture of your *Ishtadevta* (your favourite God form) if you like. The lamp should be on a level slightly lower to your eyes. Now, partially close your eyes till all else is blotted out except the flame burning before it. All else will be (blotted) out. If you try this out in experimental fashion, you will understand better. Now, keep on gazing at the image and the flame, trying to keep your mind as blank and free from thoughts as possible. You will slowly begin to feel a warmth suffusing your eyes. Drink in the warmth of the light and try to visualise the flame in the mid-eyebrow region in the centre of your forehead. You will feel a warm sensation there. Now, try and make the light and the warmth travel slowly down your body to the throat, chest, arms, hands, then down to the abdomen and then the legs. You will find that the whole body is relaxed and feels light. You feel deeply at peace with yourself and the rest of the world. If you have followed the procedure properly and done everything correctly, you will have a feeling of love towards everyone, to all and sundry, towards the whole world as a matter of fact. Gone are the feelings of rancour, of bitter resentment, of hatred or malice that you used to feel previously. Instead, you are filled with a great joy and love towards man and beast. This wonderful feeling may last for just seconds, minutes or even for an hour or two. You must endeavour to make it last as long as possible. If you follow up with another session of *dhyanam* at, say, noon time or at 6 pm, then you may succeed in being in that elevated mood for the greater part of the day. This meditation on light, if continued day after day, will slowly but surely take you to your goal. Remember, however, that Rome was not built in a day. Even the great *rishis* of yester- years had to retire for years into

the forest in order to meditate. So, do not get impatient for results, but persevere quietly and patiently and you will be blessed with success.

Next in line, is Sound meditation or *Manthra Japam*. For this, it would be ideal if you have a *guru* who could give you your own individual *manthra* to meditate upon. If you do not have a *guru*, it doesn't matter. You can take up any of the *manthras* like '*Aum Namasshivaya,*' '*Aum Namo Narayana*' or merely '*Aum*' or even '*Soham*'. First of all, adopt the same sitting position and pose as for *Jyothi* meditation. Then, with your eyes closed, start chanting the word '*Aum*' *three* times, nine times, or if you like even twenty-one times. Then start repeating the manthra. Repeat it loudly and clearly, pondering all the while on the meaning of every syllable. Do not let it become a mere lip service. Continue with this *abhyasa*, maybe for months if necessary, even if you feel it monotonous. Be patient and your ceaseless efforts will be crowned with success.

About the *Kundalini Yoga* and meditation, I am extremely loth to talk as this type of meditation can only be done under the expert advice and guidance of a *guru*. It is not at all feasible for a novice or an aspiring beginner. However, if anyone of you is curious about it, you may meet me later after the lecture and I shall explain about it.

As regards Transcendental Meditation, it is not my forte at all. I am of a school of thought that does not think much of it at all. I feel, however, that it at least soothens the upset emotions, curbs the unquiet mind a bit, thereby decreasing the mental tensions and acting generally as a tranquilliser. As such, it may be the modern harassed man's panacea for nervous break-down or mental illness; but frankly, it is not my cup of tea and I don't see it taking you to the highest truth, at least, not for ages. If there are any ardent followers of TM here or anyone who disagrees with me, forgive me please, as I am merely stating my personal opinion. I am not saying it is the Gospel Truth.

So much about the various types of *dhyanam*. A word of warning though, to all my eager friends, who are just rearing to go home, spend the night somehow and then jump out of bed at 3 am tomorrow morning to practise diligently all that I've told them during the course of meditation! After a couple of weeks or months, you may start perceiving strange lights, hear heavenly music, or even behold wondrous sights. I warn you, dear friends, these are all the side products of meditation, and as such they are fraught with great danger. They may, with their great charm, deter you from proceeding towards your goal and finding

the end product. Beware of these beautiful Circes, these charming sights and sounds. Ignore them and proceed steadfastly towards your ultimate goal. After a certain period, you may even find that you have developed some extraordinary powers like levitation, insight into the future, etc. But ignore these powers and proceed. Many an aspirant has fallen a victim to these beautiful experiences, fallen into the trap of these powers and has deviated from his godly goal into a world filled with ego, power, fame and arrogance.

Well, dear children, I have far exceeded my usual quota of time and hope that you will not take me to task for it. Happy meditation tomorrow, my dears!

"What are the fruits of a deep meditation? First of all, man becomes a peaceful being. No matter how life treats him, his consciousness remains centred within the self.

As we go on meditating deeper and deeper, the consciousness begins to expand. There awakens a longing to forget the fleshy form and behold the self in all beings. We want to do for others; the desire arises to selflessly serve mankind.

As one meditates regularly throughout his life, he begins to perceive the great ocean of love that lies within himself. Devotion for God brings us to that state wherein we know him as Cosmic Love, expressing itself through all human manifestations of love".

-Sri Sri Daya Ma

12. VISION OF THE DIVINE

The next day, after his usual invocation to Lord Ganesha, *Swamiji* Began- "Well, my dears, so much about the different types of meditation. I'm sure some of you must have most diligently tried out either *Jyothi* meditation or *Manthra Japam*. I hope you felt happy and peaceful. Continue with unabated force and enthusiasm, my dear ones, and you will surely be blessed with a vision of the Divine.

Friends, you may wonder - "Why does this funny Swamiji keep talking on and on about the methods of meditation and the pathways to God? Why does this fellow beat around the bush? Why not save us all this bother of meditation and show us the instant pathway to God? "Friends, this may be the age of instant coffee, but alas! One cannot get instant salvation. So, I'm afraid you have to persevere in one of the three margas and yourself find out the truth. Then again, you may think, "This ochre-robed fellow professes to be a man of God. As such, he must surely have seen or felt God or had some experience at least of the Divine. Why can't he then describe God to us instead of putting us to all this trouble of finding out. We will even pay him handsomely for sharing his experiences with us." Well, dears, firstly God is not a commodity to be bought or sold in the market place. Secondly, let me assure you that it is impossible for me, or for anyone for that matter, to describe with any accuracy, the nature of God. Let me put it this way. Supposing you were eating a piece of *Mysore pak* and your neighbour came in at that moment and asked you to describe the taste of the sweetmeat. To that you can only reply that the *Mysore Pak* is sweet, can't you? Can you really describe it properly to your friend and can he understand its nature without actually tasting it? Well friends, it is likewise with God. Unless you yourself experience Him there's no use. No use of preachers like me yelling from platforms, no use of *sadhus* and the like giving sermons. Nay, sirs! You have to see, smell, taste and experience for yourself. That's the reason why I do not elaborate on the nature of God. That is left to each one of you to discover for yourself. Just imagine that you are watching a very thrilling krimi on the TV. You sit with baited breath at the edge of your seat, full of suspense. Halfway through the movie, your neighbour coolly walks in and says - "Hey I've seen this movie before. The murderer is Mr.X. "Wouldn't you be furious

with your neighbour? How dare he happily walk in and spoil all your fun by revealing the end! Where's the zest of the krimi without the suspense?

So, too, where's the sense of adventure in your *dhyanam* if you already know what exactly to find at the end of the road? Don't you agree with me, my children? If you do insist on knowing a few facts however, let me invite my young friend Prashant onto the platform."

Prashant left his seat, approached the platform, climbed up the steps and made his *pranams* to the *Swamiji. Swami* smiled sweetly at him and said, " Dear Prashant, you remember what I told you a fortnight ago about the nature of God - Well, why don't you repeat what I've told you, to all your friends assembled here? It might do them good too."

The obedient Prashant spent the next quarter of an hour relating to the audience all that *Swamiji* had told him. "Thank You, Prashant," said the Swamiji at the end of his narration. "That was very nicely said. Shall we stop now? We will talk about the *Bhakti Marga* tomorrow".

"The purpose of spiritual education or Brahma Vidya is to enable man to have a Vision of the Divine in society. When man combines this Vision with Tapas, he merges with God. The vision of Divinity and merging with Divinity are the two poles; one positive, the other negative. The positive and negative will join together and take you to a position where you will become Divine."

- Baba

13. BHAKTHI MARGA

Swami - Regarding the *Jnana marga*, there's still a great deal I have to tell you about sense control, proper diet for the spiritual aspirant, the three *Gunas*, etc. I don't wish to tell you all this in the form of lectures, as I don't have many more days here with you. So may I suggest a question and answer session after my talk on *Bhakthi Yoga*? Because some of these may be relevant even to a person following the *Bhakthi marga*. Therefore, after my talks on *Bhakthi Yoga* - there may be three or four in that topic - let us have a sort of open session, where you can ask me any doubts that you have - especially about diet and other disciplines.

Now, let me come to the theme for today- *Bhakthi Yoga* or *Bhakthi Marga*. The word '*Yoga*' itself means union with God. It is a word containing all the wealth of the world, it is a word rich in meaning, fraught with meaning. For, after all, what is *Bhakthi*? It is love, Divine Love for God - oneness with the Lord, union with Him. Loving, loving God unceasingly, with every breath in your body, letting every word, thought and action be one of worship, filling your mind with thoughts of Him, blotting out all mundane, material things - this is *Bhakthi*. I'm not saying that you should neglect your worldly duties - no never. God Himself will never approve of a person who shirks or neglects his duty. What I'm asking you to do is to dedicate all these thoughts and actions to God. For example, when you are cutting vegetables for a curry, imagine that you are cutting away all your bad qualities. When you are rolling out chapathis, think you are flattening out your ego. While engrossed in your daily duties, chant His Name ceaselessly, sing *Bhajans* while engrossed in your daily tasks. Why, instead of humming film tunes in the bathroom, you can sing some *bhajans*, can't you?

Don't fall into the error of imagining God, the Lord, to be an awful, awe-inspiring Entity, intent on passing judgement on you and punishing you for your misdeeds. This is the greatest error, the greatest mistake of all time. For the Lord is soft as butter - His Love for you is "that of a thousand mothers." He is not only a mother, but also a Father, Brother, Sister, *Guru*, Companion and Friend. He is our All - our Everything.

Twameva Mathacha, Pitha Twameva,
Twameva Bandhuscha, Sakha Twameva,
Twameva Vidya, Dravinam Twameva,
Twameva Sarvam Mama Deva Deva.

God is everything to us - He is Friend, Philosopher, Guide. He is the best confidant. Repose in Him all your worries, troubles and sorrows. Who is better than He to help and guide you, advise and console you? He is soft, compassionate, ever benevolent and merciful. But unless there is some sincerity in your prayer, genuine feeling in your longing, the Lord will not respond. Mere lip service and the performance of rites and rituals is not enough. The Lord Himself says, "though My Heart is soft as butter, it melts only when there is some warmth in your prayer. The yearning, the agony of unfulfilled aim, that is the warmth that melts My heart. This is the anguish that wins Grace." And when this Grace is showered, the malady of our lives is converted into a rapturous melody.

My friends, forgive me if I cannot do full justice to this topic of *Bhakthi Yoga*. I am hapless, I am helpless, to explain to you this great emotion of *Bhakthi* or love for this Almighty Being called God. Can anyone measure the depth of the sea? Can he fathom the depths of the ocean? How can one ever begin to explain all about the most loving merciful compassionate Lord? One can only experience, never explain. If someone asks you to explain the taste of sugarcandy, can you with any precision do so? You can only say that it is sweet and some what hard. The other person has to taste the candy himself in order to understand its taste. Therefore, I declare to you again that my attempts at explaining God to you are futile, just like those of a rat trying to gnaw at a mountain. Come, taste the candy for yourself, drink the honey yourself and you will be amply and richly rewarded. Don't rely on my descriptions to equip you with a picture of God. You must find out for yourself and the way to do that is through love — love Him, love Him every second of your life, love Him as Father, Mother, as Friend, as everything.

It is said that no human relationship can bring the same infinite and complete happiness that the God-devotee relationship can. No mortal relationship can give us the same satisfaction and fulfillment. In fact, all human relationships, that of parent and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, etc., spring from the fountain of the one perfect, all embracing relationship existing between God and His devotees. They are but

reflections of the one real relationship. While all other ties in this world are temporary, that of God-devotee is constant, unchanging and real. The whole world is ephemeral, and transient. God is the only substance that is with us birth after birth, life after life, death after death. All the relationships are merely temporary. Our parents may be our parents during this lifetime only, the wife is wife only for this life. Where are all these when we die? Do they accompany us to the land of death? No! At that time, God is our only companion. Neither family nor wealth comes along with us to the next world.

Knowing this then, should it not be our duty to strive unceasingly to establish a closer bond with Him, to forge a stronger tie? Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa said - "Do you know what kind of devotion we ought to have towards our Mother? The love of a chaste wife for her husband, the attachment of a miser to his hoarded wealth, the craving of a worldling for some pleasure - all these rolled into one and directed towards the Lord, make for devotion. We shall verily gain Him this way."

Make full use of God. Hold on to His Feet and He will help you to cross the ocean of *samsara*, avoid the whirlpools of birth and death and reach the shores of *Moksha.*

"Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam
Dustara Bhavasagara Taranam"

Hold on to the Feet of the Lord, rest your mind at His Lotus Feet and He will help you cross the ocean of *samsara.*

Let me conclude today's session with a prayer in the words of Sri Sri Daya Mata - " *Give us wisdom to see that the world is only a play. My Beloved, teach me to be anchored in Your Changeless Consciousness as I behold all the sorrows and joys of life. Bless me that no matter where I go, no matter what I do, the spot-light of my mind will ever keep turning on Thee. Be thou the pole star of my life, guiding my ship-wrecked thoughts to Thy shores of safety. Thou art mine. I am Thine".*

Hari Aum Tat Sat.

"*Devotion is not a uniform to be worn on certain days, when you gather for worship and then to be laid aside when the service*

is over. It must mean the promotion of an attitude that is ever present. It is the sustenance of the heart, just as food is sustenance for the body . It is a mental outlook and attitude that is ever present."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

"Bhakthi is the state of mind, in which one has no separate existence apart from God. The Bhaktha's very breath is God; his every act is by God, for God; his thoughts are of God; his words are uttered by God, about God. Like the fish which can live only in water, man can live only in God - with peace and happiness. In other media, he has only fear, frantic struggle, failure.

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

14. BHAKTHI MARGA CONTD-

The next evening, the Swamiji resumed his lecture on *Bhakthi Yoga* "My children, develop a working relationship with the Lord, an intimate day to day, minute to minute, second to second relationship, with Him. Carry your worries and troubles to Him, He will guide and help you. Talk to Him. Talk to Him in your heart, even aloud if you like, tell Him your ambitions and aspirations, tell Him your fears and foibles, confide in Him your wishes and wants - tell Him about everything. You will observe how, gradually, a warm and intimate relationship will arise between you and God. No longer is He the one who must be put on an altar or pedestal and worshipped from afar, no longer is He the one to be enthroned or enshrined; He becomes now a warm, living being, your closest companion, your greatest friend and guide. Sri Sathya Sai Baba has said "*Intane, Kantane, Ventane, Jantane, Neethone, Neelone Untanu.* "I am in your home, in front of your eyes, behind you, beside you, with you and within you." What more can we ask for or aspire for than to live in His Presence all the time in true '*Upavasa*'? Friends, the word '*Upavasa*' does not mean fasting or abstaining from food as is commonly thought - it means living constantly in the awareness of God.

Whenever you are confronted with any problems or difficulties, place them in His Hands saying - "Lord, you have got me into this, and as I have surrendered everything to you, I am depending on you to solve them and get me out of the difficulty." And , the embodiment of love and compassion that He is, He invariably responds. Problems get solved by themselves, difficulties are smoothened and obstacles are removed.

Call and He comes! Cry out for help and He rushes to your rescue! Didn't Lord Krishna come to the aid of Draupadi when she was being dishonoured in the royal *durbar* hall of the Kauravas? Didn't Lord Vishnu respond to Prahlad's call, take on the *Narasimha Avatar* and kill the evil demon Hiranyakashipu? Didn't her Beloved Lord Krishna save the life of Meera when she was given a cup of poison to drink ? My dear children, the Lord looks after His own. Give up everything into His capable Hands, He will guard and guide you, foster and nourish you. Never fear. "Why fear when I am here?" says the Lord. So put your faith in Him and rest in peace.

My dear children, constantly practise God's presence in your lives. Instead of relegating Him into the *puja* room or temple, start seeing Him everywhere, in everything all the time. As Sri Sri Daya Mataji has said, "In working, eating, waking, dreaming, sleeping, serving, meditating, chanting, divinely loving, my soul will constantly hum, unheard by any 'God God!' "Every inch of you, every cell in you must cry out in anguish, "God, God, God!," And God will surely respond to such a sincere plea!"

When we love God in this wholehearted manner and look up to Him for everything, why, surely He will provide for our every need and want. Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* said to Arjuna, in the battle field of *Kurukshetra* - "Whosoever among My devotees dedicates all acts to Me with no other thought, whosoever meditates on Me, serves Me, worships Me, remembers Me, know that I am always with Him, ever providing for him in this world and the next. I bear the burden of his welfare *(Yogakshemam Vahaamyaham)*.

Dear children, God is always tending and taking care of His own. When His great devotee Ramdas was languishing in the debtor's prison into which he had been cast by King Tanesha, Rama accompanied by His brother Lakshmana, took human form, and personally paid the dues to the king. And thus was Ramdas set free.

When a young girl in the throes of labour was gasping for His *Vibhuthi*, Shirdi Sai Baba Himself went to her father in the form of a cart driver and conveyed the *vibhuthi* to him.

Never fear, when you have put your entire trust in the Lord. He will never let you down. Only, love Him greatly, love Him truly, Put Him first above every one else. Don't shed tears for parents, husband or wife or children, brother, sister or friend. These are all temporary, fleeting relationships. Cry and weep for God alone. God is ever ready, waiting on the door step for you. He will respond at once. Shed but one tear for Him and He will wipe a thousand from your eyes. Take but one step towards Him and He will take ten steps towards you. Only, let there be sincerity and genuine warmth in your prayer. This coupled with the anguish and (longing) in your heart for Him, your yearning for Him, will melt the Lord completely and He will be yours from that instant onwards and you will be His. Spend the day with God, live the day with God, fill the day with thoughts of Him, be mad for God. Let me end my talk with a quotation by Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi-

"To a worldly man, a God-intoxicated person will appear mad and he will laugh at him for it. But, to the God-intoxicated man, the

worldly appear insane, foolish, misled, blind. Of all the insanities that harass man, God-madness is the least harmful and the most beneficial".

Friends, '*Prema Mudhita man se Kaho, Ram, Ram, Ram*' (with a heart full of love , chant the Name Ram, Ram, Ram). Sing this *Bhajan* with me. It will uplift your hearts.

"When the devotee sincerely loves God, when his devotion becomes deep and pure, he forgets the world. He no longer cares whether the world thinks him a madman or a saint, whether the world accepts or rejects him. He wants only to feel the love of God, and to be absorbed in that love. In that consciousness, when the tears may sometimes (trickle) down his cheeks, if his mind happens to go outward for a moment, his desire is that no one sees those tears but God. That devotee may know that he is on the right path; and that gradually his devotion will become deeper, more withdrawn, more inward - but even then, it may once in a while take an outward turn.

- Sri Sri Daya Mata

15. ATMA NIVEDANAM

Dear friends, I wish to talk to you today on *Atma Nivedanam,* an important aspect of *Bhakthi Yoga*, in fact the last and final stage of *bhakthi*; that is - total surrender to God.

Friends, most of us take worship as a duty. We rush into the *puja* room every morning after bath, etc., and chant a few *slokas* rapidly at full speed, as though a horde of wild elephants were behind us, waiting to spring on us. And that is all. For the rest of the day, God is completely absent from our thoughts. Our heads are filled with mundane, materialistic thoughts. Or we go to a temple, offer flowers, fruits and a coconut, think that we have discharged our duties towards God and go home, well content and mightily pleased with ourselves. My brothers and sisters, I ask you, is this the way it should be? Can we limit our relationship to God, restrict our association with the Lord who created us, to those few minutes before an idol or a picture? Should we not (instead) instal that same idol or picture in our hearts, enshrine it there and worship it whole-heartedly with full fervour and enthusiasm? Whenever we have a little time, why can't we sit back and think of God? Even while engrossed in our daily duties, we can still keep chanting His Name ceaselessly. Can't we dedicate all our thoughts and actions to Him?

My dear friends, offer yourselves entirely and wholly up to God. Let Him do what He wants with you. Put all your trust and faith in Him. God is your greatest well-wisher. Surely, He will never do you any harm. Think. "God, I have surrendered myself unto you - body, mind and soul. I have no will of my own now. Your will is my will. Let your will be done. I am utterly and truly content to let you do what you want with me - take me where you want." This is true *Atma Nivedanam* or the offering of one's soul to God. By 'soul', we actually mean 'will' for the soul is already God, isn't it? We have to offer our free will to God and seek refuge in Him. Say to Him:

I rest my mind at Your Lotus Feet, my Lord,
I surrender my will unto You, Oh God!
Take me where You will,
Do with me what You will,
There's no more anything called mine,
Everything I have is Thine -
I myself am Thine.

This is true *Atma Nivedanam* or self-surrender. If once, you have given yourself entirely into His hands, where is the sense of worrying at all? A small child has implicit faith and trust in its mother, hasn't it. Does it keep worrying and thinking - "Where will my next bottle of milk come from?" Then, why do you fill your poor, tired head with futile thoughts and drive yourself to the point of madness with worldly worries? If you have a capable driver, you'll sit happily in the back seat of your car, close your eyes and go to sleep, or relax and enjoy the passing scenery, won't you? You'll leave all the steering, the avoiding of pit falls to him, won't you? - though many of us do have the nasty (habit) of back-seat driving , don't we! Well, God is the Eternal, Supreme Driver, the *Sanathana Sarathi*, holding the reins of the chariot called Life. Who more capable than He to guide and steer us? So, why not we just sit back, relax and leave the steering of the chariot to Him? This is the same lesson that Krishna taught Arjuna in the *Gita*.

Friends, if you have once put all your faith in the Lord, reposed all your trust in Him, surrendered everything to Him, do not pause to question or doubt. Just blindly believe in Him. Even when He tests you in a seemingly harsh manner, do not swerve away from Him. Remember, God is the Doer, you are but His instrument, He is the Amplifier, you are only the loudspeakers. This does not mean that you should sit back in utter idleness, saying that you leave everything to Him. No, never! God helps only those who help themselves. So, do your best and to God leave the rest!

Discharge your duties; perform them well;
Bear your troubles with a smile,
Holding on to the Lord's Feet all the while.
He, better than you, knows what for you is best.
Repose your faith in Him and He will do the rest.
At this juncture, I am reminded of the beautiful *bhajan*,

"Mera Jeevan Tere Havale Prabhu,
Ise Pag-pag Tu hi sambhale".

[My life into Your Hands, I surrender; Oh Lord; guide it step by step, care for and foster it]

Let me conclude with a saying of Sri Sathya Sai Baba - "What you need to cross the sea of life is the bark of *Bhakthi*, of assurance, of grace, of surrender to His will. Throw off all burdens, become light and

you can trip across with one step on one crest and another on the next. God will take you through".

Friends, I have more or less said everthing that it is possible to tell another about *Atma Nivedanam.* It is a state of mind, an attitude, and as such, cannot be taught. One can only experience it and learn for oneself how to surrender oneself to God.

If you have any questions to ask on today's topic or on any of my previous talks, you are welcome to do so. *Swami* took a sip of water from the tumbler on the table in front of him and sat down mopping his brow.

A rather earnest looking youngster got up and asked him eagerly, *"Swamiji,* is there any difference between the individuals following the different Margas - I mean, is there any difference between a *Karma Yogi,* a *Jnani* and a *Bhaktha?"*

Swamiji - Yes, certainly. Although the goal, the destination of all three is the same, their methods of approach are somewhat different. So there is bound to be some difference in their natures, in their overall personalities.

Look! of the *Karma Yogi,* there are two types. The first is the one who has dedicated his entire life to the service of God through the service of his fellow men. This man is constantly wrapped up in thoughts of God. Each time he helps a lame dog over a stile, or a blind beggar cross the street, he feels he is helping God Himself. There's also another type of *Karma Yogi,* the social worker, who is an atheist. But although he does not believe in the existence of a God, he believes in his fellow men and as such, has dedicated his life towards serving his suffering brethren. Let me quote an example here. In an obscure jungle in the wilds of Africa, there once lived a white doctor, who used to care for the sick natives with great devotion and selfless dedication. After many years of nursing the sick, this doctor himself fell victim to a tropical disease and lay dying. Suddenly, a young native rushed into his tent, crying out that an epidemic of disease had broken out in the next village. Without a single moment's hesitation, the doctor got up from his death bed, told the young man to fetch a stretcher, got onto it and was carried to the next village. There, he gave the necessary injections and medicines to all the afflicted. Only when he had dispensed medicine to the last patient, did he tell the stretcher bearers to turn him towards home. Back in his own tent, the doctor breathed his last.

Let me inform you, friends, that this doctor was a total atheist. But what do you think of his spirit of selfless service, his self-sacrifice, his total lack of concern for himself? My dears, this man must surely be nearer to God, than you and me sitting here calmly, indulging in mere words - he must be very close to God, very dear to Him.

Now, let me try and explain to you the difference between a *Jnani* and a *Bhaktha*. The *Jnani* is like the flame of an oil lamp, while the *Bhaktha* is like a gem, a precious stone. In order to burn, an oil lamp requires firstly a lamp, then oil and a wick, lastly, a match is needed to ignite it. But a gem has its own light, it is self-luminous and does not depend on any external object for its light. It is the same with a *Jnani* and a *Bhaktha* also. Just as the flame can be extinguished by a heavy gust of wind, or when the oil is over, or when the wick is burnt out, the *Jnani* too, may be affected by external factors like praise or criticism. Receiving the adulation of others, he may, after a while, become arrogant. Since he practises the *Advaitha* Philosophy - that is God and he are both one and the same, he may become egoistic and vain and start misusing the powers he has gained. Many a *Jnani* has fallen victim to his own powers or *siddhis* and has deviated from the Godward path into a world of egoism, show and power-madness.

A *true Bhaktha*, on the other hand, is ever humble , ever subservient to God; the Lord is his Master and he is but the humble slave. He is content to sit at the Lotus Feet of his Beloved Lord and worship, he does not crave for adulation or power. He is of a quiet and retiring nature, ever humble and sweet, unaffected by praise or criticism from others. In (bright) sunlight, the gem reflects the rays of the sun. So too, the *Bhaktha* is but a reflection of God.

The *Jnani* may be filled with detachment and a deep sense of peace and calm, being immersed in the knowledge that he is God. But the devotee dances in divine ecstasy, he is ever in a state of rapture. He lives to serve the Lord. After you churn curds, the butter that you obtain is the *Bhaktha* - rich and creamy and thick, while the buttermilk that is left behind is the *Jnani*. I personally feel that the path of the *Jnani* is dry, while that of the *Bhaktha* is filled with sweetness, rapture and ecstasy. That's my personal opinion, however, and others may beg to differ. Remember one thing however. During the time when Rama had incarnated in Ayodhya, all the great *rishis* and sages flocked to see Him; so eager were they for His *Darshan*. They were all enlightened ones, filled with the knowledge of *Brahman* and did not really need to

see God in human form; but still they rushed to see Him, as they wanted to feast their eyes on Him and avail themselves of the golden opportunity to see God come down in human form. Some of the great sages even begged to be born again in the *Dwapara Yuga* when Lord Vishnu would incarnate again as Krishna. They were reborn as the *Gopas* and *Gopis* of Brindavan and were able to adore the Lord to their hearts's content, filled with that greatest love of all - *Madhura Bhakthi.*

That answers your question, young man, I hope. Any more questions?

A tall man wearing a grey checked shirt got up. *"Swamiji,* since childhood I have had an aversion to temples because of the noise, the bustle and confusion. Why should one go to temples?" Is it not enough if one prays quietly at home?"

Swamiji - Friend, I am indeed glad that you have asked me this particular question. In fact, you have put to me the very question that is being asked by thousands of modern men and women. It is a great misapprehension to think that it is unnecessary to go to the temples for worship. Look, all temples, at least the old ones, have been built according to correct *shastraic* procedures and the idols or deities have been installed after the necessary rites, to the chanting of appropriate *Vedic* hymns. This by itself is enough to invest the idol with a lot of power. Then too, there are all the vibrations created by the millions of devotees. Observe the temple at Tirupathi, for instance. Or the Madurai Meenakshi temple. Can't you feel the vibrations suspended tangibly in the air? These vibrations are all powerful. Can you get such vibrations in your own shrine room, young man? Certainly not. Not unless you are a devotee of exceptional calibre. In which case, you need visit no temple or holy place. You are yourself a walking temple of God.

Young man, you complain about the noise and the bustle in a temple. Now, if you were to go into a *Rajah's durbar* hall, would you find pin drop silence there? Of course not. As the king enters, there will be the usual fanfare of trumpets heralding his arrival; *purohits* will be chanting *vedic* hymns at one corner of the *durbar* hall, while in another corner, court bards will be singing verses in praise of the king and court poets will be reciting poems extolling the King's virtues. All this produces a great deal of noise, does it not? Similarly, the temple is the *durbar* hall of God and as such, there will be the blaring of trumpets and *Shehnai* chanting and singing. Now can you possibly object to all this, young man? No? Oh, and one more point. There are three kinds of worship you could do in a temple -

1. You could worship the *Nirakara* or formless God, by just going there to close your eyes and meditate, inhaling all the vibrations in the air in the meanwhile.
2. You can worship the *Sakara* God, that is, the idol? installed in the temple.
3. You can also worship God as partially formless and partially with form, that is, the *Yantras* which are buried beneath the idol.

Notice how every little thing in a temple is underlaid with rich meaning and significance? So never pooh-pooh the idea of visiting temples again. Next question, please.

A somewhat revolutionary looking man got up and said, "Swami, what about all the milk and curds, honey and ghee, that is poured on the idols for *abhishekham*? Wouldn't it be far more sensible, practical and humanitarian to send all that to an orphanage? Why waste so many food stuffs for bathing an idol?"

Swamiji - Oh friend! Where did that very same milk, curds, etc., come from? Who gave them to us? Didn't they all come to us from God? God gave you so much and you grudge Him a little milk? If you are not willing to do even that little *abhishekam* and *annadana* to the Lord, how can you expect Him to bestow plenty of grains and food on you? You are only showing your gratitude to God by giving Him back in a small measure what you have received in great abundance from Him. A sort of thanks-giving really. By propitiating God, you are only getting back milk and grain. So why grudge Him that little *abhishekam*? Of course, when all is said and done, God doesn't need to be propitiated really. He is above praise and flattery. Once you get that knowledge, you can show your gratitude to God by serving others. But you cannot expect the common man to understand all this, can you? The common man is still full of rites and rituals which he thinks will please the Lord. Let him think so and carry on with these rites and rituals. Slowly but surely, some day or the other, he too will evolve and rise above all these rites and rituals, to a level of true consciousness where the only truth is God Love - *Brahman - seva - karma - Prema.*

Till then, let people carry on with their *abhishekams* and rituals. If you stop them from doing even that, they will swerve from the righteous path, as they know no other way to God than through these rituals. Without the steel anchor of these rituals they will be cast adrift into the sea of confusion and bewilderment and will flounder helplessly.

A shabbily dressed lady got up from the back row and said "*Swami,* while performing *puja* at home, is it positively essential that we offer the *phalam-pathram-pushpam* and *thoyam* prescribed in the scriptures? Sometimes, our finances do not permit".

Swamiji - If you can offer all these, it is alright. But the Lord does not ask for all this. All He wants is your love. Let me quote to you a poem that I have come across -

"Your heart is the flower I seek, (hrydaya pushpam)
Your love is the food I ask for (aharam)
Your tears of devotion give Me the water I need (thoyam)
Give up to Me the fruits of your deeds (karma phalam)
Offer Me the clean slate of your life to write on (jeevana pathram)
These are all the Pushpam, Phalam,pathram and thoyam I need.
(flowers, fruits, leaves and water)
I am hungry for your love - your faith alone can quench My thirst
Your Ananda (bliss) is My aharam (food)
I need no utensils of silver and gold,
This have I said a thousand fold.
I want no garlands of flowers costly and rare,
All I want is your devotion fair,
Spend no money on Me,
Spend your time meditating on Me.
Selfless service is what I ask.
Let service be from now on your most important task.
Love all, serve all, let that be your motto.
This way, you will reap My Grace most pronto"

Another lady got up. "*Swami,* can you tell us something about *Sthree dharma*?"

Swami - Tomorrow, my talk will be on *Dharma.* Since you ask, maybe I shall give a short discourse on *Sthree Dharma* too. It may be most appropriate in the modern day society.

He folded his hands together in a *namaskar,* smiled sweetly and left.

FOOT PRINTS

One night, a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life, there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You, You'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most, You would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My son, My precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of foot-prints, it was then that I carried you."

16. DHARMA

The *Swami* started his discourse after the usual prayer. "Friends, it is not easy to speak of *Dharma*. It is a topic with so many meanings, with so many controversies, with so many by-lanes and side paths. However, I'll try to put forward a few of the more salient facts. The word *'Dharma'*, as you may perhaps be knowing, means 'duty'. It means the pattern in which an individual ought to behave, the rules and regulations which govern or ought to govern his behaviour. For instance, the *dharma* of a dog is to bark at strangers and thieves and to be loyal to his master. That of a donkey is to carry loads for his master. A bee's duty is to prepare honey and to sting all those who try to steal her honey. But the *dharma* of a human being is much more complex because, of all living beings, the human being alone is endowed with reasoning powers, discrimination and a conscience. He alone can distinguish between right and wrong. A tiger or lion will automatically kill, but man knows that it is a sin to kill. So, man being born with a sense of right and wrong, being endowed with *Viveka* or discrimination, has to set his feet firmly on the path of *dharma.*

As to the *dharma* of different individuals, one cannot just sum it up with one stroke. *Dharma* will be different for different individuals and different even for the same individual at different stages of his life. In the olden days, people followed the *Ashrama Dharma*, where the life of a person was divided into four stages.

1) *Brahmacharya* or student life,
2) *Grihasthashrama* or the life of a householder,
3) *Vaanaprastha* or the life a recluse, and
4) *Sanyasa ashrama* - a stage of total renunciation.

A young lad would be initiated into his studies. He had from then on to lead a sedate life, the life of a celibate, free from desires and passions concentrating on his studies and on being an ideal son and pupil. After his studies were completed, he would enter into the next walk of life, that is, he had to marry and have children. His duties at this stage would be to be an ideal husband and father, a good provider to his family and to discharge his duties towards parents and relatives. As he

approached middle age, he had to try to slowly slacken his hold on material objects and start thinking of God, religion and spirituality. Avoiding the company of frivolous minded people, he had to, with the help of his wife, turn inwards and start contemplating on the truth. This life of an almost recluse would help him to concentrate on God. Lastly, when his children were settled in life and his duties and responsibilities as a householder had been successfully discharged, he had to, with his wife's permission and consent, retire into the forest and lead the life of a true renunciate. That was the *Ashrama Dharma* practised in olden days.

In today's materialistic and machine - like world, however, this sort of water - tight compartmentalizing or division of life into stages is not feasible. It may suffice to say that man has to discharge his duties according to which walk of life he is in. Like for example, when he is a student, his duty would be to study diligently, pass his examinations with flying colours, be honest and neat, modest in dress, be a good son to his parents and a good friend to his companions, abstaining from vices, like drinking, smoking, drugs etc. When he marries, he should be a devoted and faithful husband; later, a good father to his children and a good provider for the family, look after his aged parents, leading all the while, a life of honesty and righteousness, and in general, be an ideal member of society. As he grows older, he should slowly turn away from the materialistic world into a more spiritual plane and after his children grow up and marry, he should sit back and relax and with his mind shut away from all sensory pursuits, material objects, and human relationships, concentrate all his thoughts on God. But, ironically enough, it is the older people, who today, are full of material worries and thoughts. They spend most of their time watching the TV and interfering in the lives of the younger ones. Instead of happily sitting in a corner and chanting 'Krishna' or 'Rama' , they keep poking their noses into their children's affairs, thereby only succeeding in making themselves thoroughly unpopular with them. In fact the older they grow, the more mundane their thoughts and the more engrossed they get in *samsara*. It's a funny thing really, but today's youth and younger generation are much more interested in God and spiritualism than their older counterparts. Friends, if you make it a point to spend a few minutes every day in quiet prayer and contemplation of God, starting right away at a young, tender age, you will not find it so difficult to concentrate on God when you grow older. You see nowadays, the thoughts of the older ones are turning to 'Cholesterol' and 'blood sugar' and not Rama, Krishna, or Sai, because

they have not trained themselves from childhood. So what happens ? Till their dying day their thoughts will be of children, grandchildren, food, diet, ailments, domestic problems, daughters-in-law's behaviour, finance or even politics. They think of God as a duty - once in the morning at *Puja* time and again at night when they say their prayers. Their lips chant the Name, their fingers turn the beads, on their rosaries or *japamalas*, but their heads are filled with material paraphernalia. What sort of enlightenment can they hope to get, what kind of *Moksha*? '*Moha*' does not make for *Moksha'*, you know. With their dying breath they will call out wife's or son's or grandson's name instead of that of God and back they are ploughed into the wheel of birth and death. More and more births for them, with not a glimpse of salvation in sight. Is this what you wish to happen to you, my dears? That is why always say 'catch them young'. The childhood years are tender and receptive and not so clinical and cynical; so that's the best time to start disciplining oneself. Do you know friends - *Moha* plus *Kshaya* is equal to *Moksha;* that is to say freedom from *Moha* or liberation.

Friends, have you heard of *Swadharma*? In general, people take *Swadharma* to mean the dharma one was born to ; like the *dharma* of a *Kshatriya* is to fight, that of a farmer is to till his lands, that of a teacher is to guide and foster and teach the pupils, that of a mother is to nurture and nourish the child and rear it into a responsible adult. This is just the lay meaning of the term. Actually, the word, 'Swadharma' means one's own or intrinsic *dharma* or *Atmadharma*; that is man's duty to realise himself - to realize God.

Friends, man's advent on earth is not merely to eat and sleep, dance and play, earn his living and fritter away his life in sensory pursuits. No indeed ! Man is here on a HOLY MISSION. He must endeavour to find out the truth of who he is and why he has been born on earth. He must strive for self-realization, strive to get the inner vision of who he really is and, if he really tries hard enough, he will develop the DIVINE VISION needed for this realisation and, finally his efforts will be crowned with success and he will be blessed with a VISION OF THE DIVINE - the vision of God Himself.

Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi.

"Man is a pilgrim set on a long journey; he has started from the stone, moved onto the vegetable and the animal and has now come to the human stage. He has still a long way to go to reach the

Divine and so, he should not tarry. Every moment is precious, every step must take him further and nearer."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

"The ideals laid down by Sanathana Dharma for ensuring a happy, peaceful life for man, individually and in society, are valid even today; the disciplines marked out therein are as beneficial today as when they were first ordained in the Shastras. Their value is unchallengable, unchangeable. Do not imagine yourself as "Hindu' for the reason that you are born in Hindustan. You are too entangled in the rules of caste, the ceremonial of rituals and the coils of astrology to grasp your own inner Reality. You do not realize the spark of Divinity in you and try to raise it into the flaming fire of Divine splendour, reducing your petty 'I' into ashes. But, the Sanathana Dharma tells about the spark and teaches you how to foster it and develop it. When you therefore ignore this Dharma and allow Science to entice you, you are bringing disrespect to your culture and disowning your country."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

"Money comes and goes; morality comes - and grows!

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

"Life has to be spent in accumulating and safeguarding virtue, not riches. Listen and ruminate over the stories of the great moral heroes of the past so that their ideals may be imprinted in your hearts. Virtue is becoming rare nowadays, in the individual and in family, society and community, in all fields of life, economic, political and even 'spiritual'. So also, there is a decline in discipline, which is the soil on which virtue grows. Unless each one is respected, whatever his status, his economic condition, his spiritual development, there can be no peace and no happiness in life. This respect can be aroused only by the conviction that the same Atma that is in you is playing the role of the other person. See that Atma in others; be aware that they too have hunger, thirst, yearning and desires as you have; develop sympathy and the anxiety to serve and be useful."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

17. STHREE DHARMA

The next day found the ladies gathered in large numbers to hear the *Swami* speak on *Sthree Dharma.*

Swami cleared his throat and began - "I am very glad that many of you ladies have approached me and asked me to speak on the duties of a woman - namely, *Sthree Dharma.* As you may see, this is a vital issue, as the role of woman in society today cannot any more be clearly defined as in the olden days. What with women's lib, etc., no woman knows any more where exactly she stands. Nor does the male today treat her with the respect due to a person who procreates the human race.

The *sthree* is the person who is the mother of the future generation.

Ought not we then to treat her with rather more veneration?

Using her as a servant and a chattel has become man's only consideration.

As to the woman herself, gossiping has become her greatest avocation.

Why, oh why has the character of women in general so deteriorated, so degenerated? She does not discharge her duties in the manner expected of her and laid down in the olden days by the great *rishis* and seers. Instead, she marches and fights for equal rights with men and contests in elections.

If every woman's sole desire is to become a minister,

Who will to the needs of her family minister?

Who will her neglected household administer?

In the olden days, women were highly respected, loved and obeyed. A man looked upon every woman other than his wife as a mother or a sister, depending on their ages. Woman was venerated as the Goddess Parvathi Herself. But now, what has happened to that *Sthree* image? The woman of today has cheapened herself by dancing in music halls and night clubs. She has sacrificed morality for money, not realizing the fact that 'money comes and goes, but morality comes and grows'. Gone is the maidenly modesty, the womanly reticence so becoming in a woman. They have been replaced by aggression and ambition in today's woman. Where is the sweetness, the humility so enchanting in yesterday's

woman? Today's women are proud and haughty, egoistic and avaricious, wanting to keep up with the Joneses, not condescending to do their house-hold tasks themselves, but consigning everything to servants. I'm not saying that they should not employ servants - they may do so by all means; if they have the means to do so; but certain tasks like cooking for the household, and looking after the children, should be taken care of by the housewife herself. If the care of the children is entrusted to *ayahs*, the children will become spoilt and will also develop the mentality of the servants. They will lose respect for the parents, become alienated from them, and later on, in abject misery and total frustration at the lack of love and understanding from the mother , they may turn to smoking, alcohol, drugs and other vices. Unhappy homes, where the father is away all the time on business affairs and tours and the mother is busy with her social round and so called social service, are the main causes of juvenile delinquency today. Why should the mother waste her time in clubs and parties? She can spend her time more richly and rewardingly with her children. Why does she expend all her energies in social service, doing her rounds of orphanages and old homes, while her children are little better than orphans themselves and her aged parents and parents-in-law are no better off than those in old homes? Doesn't she realize that Charity begins at home? Let her mend her household first, then she can think of improving the nation. Let her govern her children properly before she can even think of becoming the governor of the state. Let her minister to the needs of her children before standing for election for the post of Chief Minister!

Friends, forgive me if I seem to get excited, but I have seen too may homes destroyed due to the frivolous mentality and careless unheeding of the woman, seen too many marriages end in divorce due to lack of a little understanding and love, too many children driven to alcohol and drugs by unfeeling, uncaring, unsympathetic mothers, not to get angry enough, excited enough to try and do something to repair the situation.

Well, instead of raving and ranting about the behaviour of women today and bemoaning, bewailing and lamenting the loss of yesterday's woman, I should perhaps get down to brass tacks and state the duties and responsibilities of woman.

My dear sisters, a *sthree* is a most important person. She is like the Goddess Lakshmi Herself. She is *Prakrithi*, Nature. She is the mother of the future generation. She has to nourish and nurture her children, foster and guide them and make them grow into good individuals

and responsible citizens. She has to be a support and guide to her husband too. Behind every successful man is a good wife. She is, in fact, everything in her household - wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, mistress, housewife, hostess, cook, laundress, chartered accountant and home minister. She carries therefore a great deal of responsibility on her shoulders. In order to do all this, the character of a woman must be spotless, above reproach, without blemish.

As a young child, her duty will be to obey her parents, be a loving daughter to them, a good confidant and companion to her brothers and sisters and a good student at school. She should work hard at her studies, not only for her own sake, but also because she needs to have the knowledge which is to be imparted to her children later on in life. When she blossoms into radiant womanhood, she is given by her parents in marriage to a deserving young man. From now on her home is her husband's house, his parents are like her own; she has to be like a daughter to them and look after their every need. They, on the other hand, have to treat her like a daughter too and not make her life a misery, as is wont by the mothers-in-law of today. The wife must walk hand in hand with her husband always, both should be in accord. They should be loving towards each other, considerate towards each other; each should understand the other like her own self. The wife should administer to her husband's needs herself, not allowing any servant to do them. What greater bliss or joy for a man can be there than when his wife stands in front of him early in the morning, a cup of fragrant, steaming coffee in one hand and the day's newspaper in the other! And what greater thanks can the wife get than the smile of joy and pleasure on her husband's face and his loving pat on her cheek. To have meals piping hot and ready on the table when the family comes home, to be served lovingly by herself - that is the hallmark of every good housewife. Don't relegate this task to a servant.

The wife should support her husband in everything he ventures upon and when he is on the wrong path, she should gently chide and admonish him and steer him on to the right path. She should always look neat and attractive, be sweet -natured and humble. Arrogance in woman is most unbecoming. It is not the nature of *sthree* at all. Even when she is managing a given situation most efficiently, she must not appear to be doing so, but must be very unobtrusive about it. She must know when to remain in the background and when to come to the fore. If her husband is of a traditional outlook, he may not like her talking to other men, in

which case, she must respect his wishes, instead of arguing with him about the equality of the sexes. What has she to lose by respecting her husband's wishes and remaining in the background? That only enhances her image in his and everyone else's eyes after all, besides protecting her from undesirable glances.

If due to financial pressure, the woman has to find work outside the home, she should not become proud or arrogant because she is earning a salary almost equal to that of her husband. It would be better for her to remain at home until her children are grown up and not dependant on her, but if it is financially imperative for her to go to work, then she must plan her routine in such a way that she spends the maximum time with her husband and children in the evenings and they do not suffer due to her absence from home during the day.

For his part, the husband too must cherish and love the wife, protect her and look after her needs. He must be thoughtful, affectionate and considerate, make her rest if she is ill and not expect her to be his slave and work herself to death. There should be mutual love, understanding and consideration between them. When the babies come, she must be a loving mother, feed and nurture the child herself without paying any heed to the new-fangled notions of tinned milk. A child nursed by the mother is a happy child, a well-adjusted child. The mother should look after the infant herself and not entrust it to a nurse or *ayah*, as, in these precious, tender, formative months, the child's greatest need is the mother.

As the infant grows into childhood, its need for the mother keeps taking new forms. At first, it needed her for feeding and fondling , now it needs her as a friend, playmate and confidante. During school and adolescent years too, it's need for the mother is great. The school child needs the mother's help with homework, her advice with problems. So the mother always has to be at the disposal of her children; she always has to be on hand when they need her. Many a child has failed to fare well at his studies because no one at home cared to help him. Many a teenager has fallen into bad company and bad ways because the mother was not available to lend a ear to his problems. So the mother has to tactfully divide her time between husband and children. The morals of the children, their behaviour pattern, are all formed and set by the mother.

As the children grow up, their need for the mother decreases and finally they leave the fold. Now the woman is free to spend all her time on religion, introspection and spiritual activities. Not only that. She has to try and draw her husband into the spiritual path. Together, hand in

hand, they have to tread the spiritual path, loving all, serving all, till they find the pathway to God. This is indeed the true meaning of marriage - both partners helping each other in their quest for God, treading the path together and reaching the goal. Mere understanding of each other and love for each other do not constitute a true marriage. Each partner has the duty to help the other onto the Godward path and in finding self-realization. I repeat - a true marriage is not merely good adjustment and mutual love and respect between the partners. A true marriage is one in which the husband and wife, after having fulfilled all their duties, walk hand in hand on the spiritual path. It is chiefly the woman's role to influence the husband in this aspect. So, in this, she has to be the leader and he the follower.

Let me journey a little backward into the woman's life and say that even when the children are still young and need her and take up her time and attention; even when she has a lot of duties, social and towards family, the woman should, in the midst of all these activities, find some time to dedicate to God. After she has finished her daily chores, her routine tasks, she can spend some of her free time in *Dhyanam* and *Namasmaranam*, can't she, instead of spending it in gossip, idle chitchat or knitting?

A word of caution here however. She should not forget that she should first finish all her duties and then settle down to worship. No one should be put to trouble or inconvenience because the lady of the house is sitting in *dhyanam* or *puja*. No use the lady professing to be deeply religious and spiritual and spending her entire time in prayer and *puja*, while her home and family go neglected! That's not true *Sthree Dharma* at all!

Well sisters, I have more or less summed up all the salient factors of *Sthree Dharma*. I hope it has answered to a certain extent at least some of your burning doubts and queries."

Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi.

"The feminine is the foundation on which a peaceful and happy world is to be raised. When women are true and brave, kind and compassionate, virtuous and pious, the world can have an era of peace and joy."

"Woman has been extolled in ancient scriptures as well as in classical poetry as Grihalakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity in the

home. She is the Dharmapathni, the companion of the husband in the fulfilment of the duties and rights as a householder."

"No nation can be built strong and stable except on the spiritual culture of its women."

"Women, who were all these centuries, the bulwarks of Indian culture, the guardians of Indian spiritual wealth, are fast succumbing to the flimsy attractions of foppish culture, as is evident from the modes of living and the social behaviour of many educated women. This is the result of the artificial and empty system of education as well as the subtle pulls of cheap literature and shoddy films. Women are the mothers of the coming generation; they are the teachers of that generation".

"The mother is the pillar of the home, of society, of the nation, and so of humanity itself. Mothers should know the secret of mental peace, of inner silence, of spiritual courage, of contentment which is the greatest wealth, and of adhyatmic discipline which gives lasting joy".

"The mother herself must look after the children during the early years; if the child is handed over to servants and ayahs, they will learn their habits of living and speech, and they will weep only when they die, not when the mother dies! For, they start loving the ayah more than the mother who has shoved them on to another, as a nuisance and a bother! She must herself prepare food for the home; for, food which is prepared with love and served with a smile is much more sustaining and strengthening than food cooked by a hired woman and served by a disgruntled, refractory kitchen boy".

"Again I will insist that the educated woman must herself run the home and shoulder all the burdens of nursing and nourishing the members of the family. The Ananda that can be derived by unselfish scattering of love is a rare, elevating experience. It is a very valuable Sadhana".

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

18. TESTS, TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS

"Friends, most of you will agree with me that, after drawing us towards Him, the Lord proceeds to subject us to a torrent of tests and trials. It is indeed common knowledge that some of the greatest devotees of yore, like Meera, Sakhubai, Harischandra, Prahlad, Ramdas, Tukaram - to name only a few - were inflicted with untold miseries and sufferings. So is the case with each one of His devotees. There come a series of troubles and tribulations, hurdles and hardships, maladies and malaise, administered by Him apparently for the express purpose of unseating us from the altar of faith. Why? Why does God send us these sorrows, hurdles, trials and tribulations?

Look friends, as Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi has said *"When you hang a picture on the wall, you shake the nail and find out whether it is firm enough to bear the weight of the picture. So too, in order to prevent the picture of God (the image in your mind and heart) from falling and being shattered to bits, the nail (God's Name) driven into the wall of the heart has to be shaken to ascertain whether it is firm and steady."* Baba has said - *"The Lord has ordained sorrow, for without sorrow, man will not cling to God, It is something like dietary and other restrictions which the doctor prescribes in order to supplement the effect of his drug. Man must welcome trouble, for that alone brings sweetness to the spirit within."*

Friends, when we are in trouble, we turn to God, pray to Him and ask for help. We say 'cure my brother' or 'heal my son,' oh God and I will go to Tirupathi", etc. But I ask of you, how many of us turn to God or even think of Him when we are happy? So, unless God puts trials and hurdles in our way, we will not even pause a moment from our worldly concerns to spare a thought for Him.

God is the Divine Doctor, the Supreme Surgeon, the Holy Psychiatrist. He knows that only difficulties and obstacles can toughen our character and strengthen the inner spirits. His is the kind cruelty of the surgeon's knife, for without inflicting a wound, the illness cannot be cured. While making a gold ornament, the goldsmith has to heat the gold, beat it and twist it before he can make the ornament. The diamond in its rough and unhewn form looks no better than a piece of glass. It is

only after it has been properly treated, cut and polished, that it acquires value and beauty. We are like these diamonds in uncut form - only by facing life's problems, can our character develop. We should learn to regard these tests and trials as blessings in disguise, because they alone can purge and purify us, making us grow from weak, tender saplings to strong gigantic trees. "*Life is a challenge, meet it*"

A film which has no villains or 'masala' will flop heavily at the box office. God as the Supreme Producer and Director of the Drama called Life, knows that in order to create spice and variety, He has to introduce some hurdles, a few piquant situations, a little tragedy, some laughter and a few thrills.

My friends, "Sweet are the uses of adversity" and after having placed such adversity in our path, the mischievous Lord stands back, a hand on His Hip, a smile on His lip, watching us. Will we sink along with our troubles, until we fall away from Him, disappointed and disenchanted? Or will we rise above them and cling to His support with even greater fervour? Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi once told me that I should be like a bouncing rubber ball. The harder He hit me against the ground, the harder I should bounce back to Him. To which I assented and said, "Baba, If you lift Your leg to kick me, I shall catch hold of that very leg tightly and not let go. What will you do then? Hoe will You kick me?" And Baba replied. "Then I shall greet you with open arms, saying that you have passed the test and have earned your certificate".

Friends, what is the use of having so many degrees? What you must have is pedigree - character. And that is what the Lord is moulding when He sends us test after test. We should not take it to be a '*Pariksha*' (examination) but a '*Rakshana*' (saving)

Sri Sri Daya Mataji advised - *"Take philosophically the trials that come to you each day and do your best to adjust yourselves. No matter how severely life tosses us about, we should not allow ourselves to sink within the ocean of delusion, the ocean of sadness, the ocean of Maya. Be like the cork on the ocean; no matter how much the waves toss the cork about, it always rides on the crest."*

Friends, do not grumble when God sends you all these travails. Do not say - "I have so much faith in God, why does He trouble me so?" In fact, its a question of the greater the faith, the stronger the testing. The question papers of an M.Sc examination will be far more tough than those of an SSLC examination. So my dears, do not grumble, but grit your teeth, brace yourself and face bravely whatever hardship confronts you, with the Name of the Lord on your Lips. Let me assure you, my

dears, the Lord is soft as butter, He cannot bear to see us suffer. Once He finds we are not unseated or overthrown by the hurdles, He rushes to our aid and helps us to tackle the problems and gives us the necessary strength to face up to them. Let me tell you that God is always there beside us - guiding, guarding, counselling, and comforting when we stumble. His is the Hand that lifts us up and encourages us on. When we are weary and exhausted, His is the touch of cool comfort and blessed balm which revives and renovates.

Silver Birch, the renowned guide of the spirit world said, "There is no trouble in your world of matter which is greater than the power you have within you for overcoming it, because the troubles are of the earth, material, and you are part of the Great Spirit, Divine. There is no problem that comes to anyone which he is incapable of solving. There is no difficulty that you cannot conquer, if you would but allow the latent divinity to rise to the surface."

Let me share with you, two sayings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I think that by now, my dear friends, you would have guessed that Baba is my Guru - in fact, He is everything to me. Baba says - *"Do you think I would confront you with pain were there not a reason for it? Open your heart to pain as you do now for pleasure, for it is My Will, wrought by Me for your own good. Welcome it as a challenge. Do not turn away from it. Turn within and derive the strength to bear it and benefit by it. It is all my plan to drive you by the pangs of unfulfilled need, to listen to My Voice, which, when heard, dissolves the ego and the mind with it".*

"It is like baking a cake. I stir, I knead, I pound, I twist, I bake you. I drown you in tears, I scorch you in sobs. I make you sweet and crisp, an offering worthy of God. I have come to reform you. I won't leave you until I do that. Even if you stray away before you become a successful sadhaka, I will hold on to you. You cannot escape from Me".

Friends, I think your, poor heads have been stuffed enough today with sayings and quotations, so let me easea the burden a bit by ending on a lighter note.

Some years ago, when I had been beset at every turn by some problem or the other, overwhelmed by anxiety on many scores, troubled by one issue after another, I, in a fit of pique wrote a poem to Baba.

It goes as follows-

When You test the devotee's devotion
And the extent of their dedication,
Between tests, let there be a short vacation,
In which You can hold a convocation
And certify to men their degree of graduation.
This manner You have of continuous provocation
Let it not be your eternal avocation.
We know You are the Director
And each one of us but the actor.
But even the actor should know the script
So that he may do his little bit.
Does a good director keep changing the script
Merely to suit his whim and wit?
Does he call for the settings of a wedding scene grand,
And when the actors have turned up, complete with band,
Wave it away with an airy hand?
Leaving them bereft and baffled to stand
And proceed instead gaily to a sequence of song and dance,
Not giving the actors even the slightest chance
To take a deep breath and ask, merely ask -
They are not taking him to task.
All they ask is - why oh why?
Why do you leave us so high and dry?
Do we not have the right to know each day
The part we are supposed to play,
And what we have to do and say?
Can we play our parts to perfection
When, of the whole we have no comprehension?
'Tis only fair You tell us the plot,
Lest our acting comes to nought".

I never did post the poem to Baba, my friends!

"The road of life is filled with many rocks of trials and tribulations. We cannot expect God to remove them from our path, but we can ask Him to give us the strength and the wisdom to avoid stumbling over them. God does not intend that we have no obstacles

in life, for then we would remain weak. He wants us to become stronger by surmounting them.

To gain this strength, we need to follow only one simple formula; increase our love for the Divine Mother. With the expansion of our heart's feeling for God, every mountain of difficulty is reduced to a tiny mole hill. Everything that before seemed impossible of accomplishment becomes realizable".

- Sri Sri Daya Mata

19. ROLE PLAY

The *Swami* commenced his last discourse after his usual prayer to Lord Ganesha.

"Friends, today I wish to talk to you about Role Play. It was Shakespeare who said that" the world is a stage and men and women are merely actors in it". The minute we take birth in this world , we begin to participate on the stage of life. As actors, we are progressing from role to role, from that of a child artist to that of a veteran. And every single day of our lives, we are enacting innumerable roles - that of a son, daughter, mother, father, wife, husband, brother , sister, friend, teacher, pupil and so on. The same individual is engaged in playing countless different roles. An actor on the stage may have to be hero today, and villain tomorrow in another play. What if he starts identifying himself as the hero? Can he play the part of a villain to perfection on the next day? The pity of it is that we all tend to identify ourselves with the role. We must realise that these various roles are limited merely to the physical body, and, as the Immutable *Atma*, we cannot be really affected by the problems. When once this idea takes firm root in our minds, we merely 'act' and do not 'react' to situations and emotions.

There is the interesting story of a stage actor, who was called upon to enact the role of a king who had lost his kingdom and finally even his queen in a war. Stripped of crown and reduced to a pauper, he takes to the forest, lamenting his losses and misfortunes. The actor playing the role of the king put forth such a creditable and realistic performance and his histrionic talents reached such heights that the audience was moved to thunderous applause. Later, when his friend congratulated him on his performance and asked him how he could weep so realistically and convincingly, the actor smiled and showed him the glycerine drops that had caused the eyes to water.

After a couple of months, this same actor had the tragic misfortune of losing his wife. When his friend called on him to condole and comfort, he found the actor miserable and inconsolable, weeping copiously. After sympathizing and commiserating with him for a while, the friend remarked "My friend, today, your weeping is better than it was last time". To which the actor retorted, "Last time, I was acting. Now I am not."

We are all like this actor. Because of *Maya* and ignorance, we get totally involved and immersed in the various scenes of life. We allow ourselves to become enmeshed and embroiled in the grip of emotions, situations and feelings. Not only are we 'acting' but also 'reacting' to the problems facing us in our roles. When the veil of *Maya* is lifted and torn asunder, we realize that 'Life is a game' and we should merely play it, not get involved. And when we realize this truth, we will play our roles even better, giving to them our best effort and ability, but at the same time, remaining unaffected by the peaks and troughs, the heights and depths.

The *Gita* says - "The *Atma* dons the garb of the physical body, just as the physical body dons clothes. The *Atma* remains untouched and unchanged till eternity, but the body goes through the various stages of life, getting transformed at every stage. Thus the child disappears in the boy, the boy disappears in the youth, the youth becomes lost in the middle-aged man, the middle-aged man is lost in the aged old man and the old man is lost in death. These changes are all related to the physical, the material - the body. They do not affect the spirit, the soul or *Atma*. The moment we realise this, we attain *Moksha*".

Oh Lord! This life is a stage
On which is being enacted the drama called Life
Of which You are the Supreme Producer and Director.
Yours is the script, the lyrics are Yours,
So are the settings.
We are but mere actors
Enacting the role You have allotted to us to play.
Help us oh Lord, to act our roles to perfection,
Without being filled with elation or dejection.
Let us act our roles well, while remaining in superb detachment
And may we only to You have attachment.
This is the attitude we ought to cultivate.

My children, when life is being continuously subject to change, year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute and even second after second, when we are not even certain of what is going to happen the very next second, we still glibly go about making plans for the future, we still continue to be wrapped up in our loved ones as though they will remain

attached to us unto all eternity. What a height of foolishness this is! These very same loved ones may be wrenched away from us any moment. Friends, supposing one of you were enacting the role today of Rama, with a lady acting alongside as Sita. As Rama, you are required to love Sita dearly, aren't you? But this lady will act as your wife only as long as the curtain is up. The minute the curtain falls, she ceases to be your wife and any overture on your part will only meet with a rebuff. Children, it is the same with life. The wife in this birth may be your sister in the next or even an utter stranger; you may never even meet her again after this life. The parents you respect and obey, the children you dote upon, where will they all be in the next *janma*? The chances are very rare that you will be bound together again in a similar relationship. Why, even when you die and are taken to the cremation ground, your near and dear will accompany your body, weeping and sobbing, up to the cremation ground only . But who will accompany your soul on its journey into the next world? No one. All these loved ones, those dear ones are left behind sobbing, in the burial ground and you have to proceed alone. At that time, who comes to you, who comforts and guides you and lifts you out of your dazed, bewildered state? God and God alone. He is the only Reality, both in this world and in the next, in this life and in all the lives to follow. All others are stage actors, vague, shadowy figures, here one moment, gone the next.

And what about all the money you have stowed away in the bank? The jewels in you locker, your spacious 'five bedroomed-bath attached' house with its lush green lawns, your costly silks and velvets? Are you taking these along with you? Friends, let me hasten to tell you that all you will be taking with you from this world to the next are the fruits of your deeds and actions, whether good or bad. Your *karma* alone will accompany you into your next birth, the credits and the debits of your present deeds and misdeeds.

When you die and are born again, you will not come into the world wearing the diamond necklace you had left behind in the precious birth, but you are born wearing the '*karma kantamala*' that is, you carry over the fruits of your actions with you to your next birth. That is the only *mala* or necklace you are born with.

"So friends, why do you weep and slave for family and wealth? Why are you so sunk in attachment towards them? You must do your duty towards your family; love and cherish them. It is true, but why do you get so totally involved with and engrossed in them, that you lose

sight of your true goal - your main objective - God? Friends, begin today, nay, begin, this very moment, to detach your mind from all these meaningless sense objects, these trivial frivolities, even from all these earthly relationships and fix your minds on the only Real, Permanent Being, namely God"!

The *Swami's* voice rose to a crescendo - "Friends, in order to realise the Divinity latent in us, we require three attributes-*Vichaara* (enquiry), *Viveka* (discrimination) and *Vairagya* (detachment). Enquiry into 'What am I' and 'What is this *Jagath* (world)', discrimination between right and wrong, the real and the unreal, and detachment from the senses and sense objects of this world will lead us to discover the world for what it is. This in turn will unfold the *Pragnana*, the knowledge of the truth and of man's divinity.

Friends, the true aspirant or seeker of truth will be undeterred by the toils and strifes of life. Holding on to the support of his Lord, he is always striving to discover the ultimate meaning of Truth and Reality. And he travels along the path, the Lord guiding and guarding, the seeker searching and striving, until he begins to master his little self and gets a glimpse of his higher self. Ignoring all the obstacles and dangers with which his path is fraught, he proceeds steadfastly and single-mindedly towards his goal, which is to go back to God, to find God, to establish his unity with God.

My children, I bless you all with success in your search.

May you soon attain the true knowledge.

Children, tomorrow will be my last evening with you . Let us have a question and answer session, so that you can come to me with whatever doubts you have and I shall endeavour to answer them .

Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi.

"This world is His Play, it is not an empty dream; it has purpose and use. It is the means by which we can discover God; see Him in the beauty, grandeur, the order, the majesty of nature. These are but shadows of His Glory and His Splendour.

The play is His, the role is his gift, the lines are written by Him; He directs, He decides the dress and decoration, the gesture and the tone, the entrance and the exit. You have to act well the part and receive His approbation, when the curtain falls. Earn, by your efficiency and ehthusiasm, the right to play higher and higher roles - that is the meaning purpose of life.

Do not worry about anything. Place yourself fully at His disposal, He knows. He has written the Play and He knows how it will end and how it will go on. Yours is but to act and retire. The Lord alone is aware of the Play, for His is the Plan! You see only a part of the Play on the stage and so it is all very confused. When the entire story is unfolded, then you will appreciate His plan, not until then; for that, you have to get behind the screen of Maya and contact the Director Himself. While you are an actor on the stage reciting your role, you cannot grasp the inner meaning of the entire play which has the 'World' as the stage and 'ages' as the duration.

You are only actors on the stage, before the footlights. The Director who knows the Play, who assigns the roles, who gives the cues, who calls you in and puts you on - He is behind the curtain. You're a puppet, He holds the strings. You are only working out His Plan. Identification with the adventure in the Play and with its success or failure will make the performances proud or depressed - states which will not help inner peace and joy. The secret of good karma, is, do karma as an act of worship, a dedicatory rite offered to God. And, never take it's consequence to heart."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

PART III

THE HOME - COMING

20. MORE QUESTIONS

The next evening, a larger crowd than usual was gathered in the playground, awaiting eagerly the Swamiji's arrival on the last evening of his stay. The *Swamiji* came on to the stage, greeted the audience with folded hands and began his usual invocation to Lord Ganesha. At the end of that, he began, "My dear children, this is my last evening here with you. Tomorrow, I shall start on my tour of Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala. I may return here after that, I am not quite certain of my programme. In any case, I thought we would have an open session today, when you could get your doubts cleared by asking questions. So, fire away please". The *Swami* smiled and sat down.

Prashant jumped up from his seat. "Swami, you said you would tell us about the three *Gunas*," he reminded eagerly, *Swami* - Oh yes, I remember. Well, nature is divided into three types of Gunas or qualities, attributes or characteristics. They are *Rajas, Thamas* and *Sathwa*. The *rajasic gunas* are the qualities of anger and passion. *Thamas* means slothful qualities like greed, slovenliness, etc. *Sathwa guna* means a nature which is free from the qualities of anger, ego, passion, lust, greed and selfishness. Sathwic nature is one of peace, calm, tranquility, equanimity. *Sathwa* is *samathwa*. It is *Atmatathwa*. You should realize that sathwa is the true atmic nature and get rid of all fiery and slothful qualities, that is, you should try to conquer *rajas* and *tamas* and become *sathwic*.

However, the *Paramatma* or the Supreme Almighty God is above all the three *Gunas*, above even the *Sathwa Guna*. He is *Nirguna* - attributeless, and, when we attain *Moksha*, we too will rise above the three *gunas*, Next question, please.

Prashant - *Swamiji,* can you tell us something about the diet ideal for a *sadhaka* or spiritual aspirant?

Swamiji - Just as there are three *gunas* or types of qualities, there are three types of food also - *Rajasic, Thamasic* and *Sathwic. Rajasic* food is the food that excites the passions - like stimulants (coffee,tea, and cocoa), some meats, and too spicy food and too salty food. *Thamasic* food is the food that induces slothful feelings, like for example, alcohol, spoilt food , stale food, twice-cooked food and too insipid food. *Sathwic* foods like milk, fruits, roots and tubers and most vegetables do not produce

any of these passions or slothful tendencies. Hence, for a *sadhaka*, it is advisable to eat only such food. Another important point to remembered is the purity of the vessels in which the food is cooked, the cleanliness of the kitchen and the character of the person who cooks and serves the food. All should be spotless. When an evil-minded person cooks or serves the food, bad emotions may arise in the minds of those who eat the food. Let me tell you a story . A famous *sadhu* once visited a village. The village headman did all the honours, greeted him with respect, paid homage to him and invited him to his house for dinner. That day, as his wife was ill, he called in a neighbour to do the cooking.

The holy man came to their home and sat down to the delicious meal. At the end of the repast, the *sadhu* looked stealthily around and when he thought no one was looking, surreptitiously picked up the silver tumbler he had drunk from, slipped it into his robe and took it away with him. All this, however, had been observed with great astonishment and shock by his host, who however, said and did nothing.

The next morning, after his morning ablutions, bath, etc., the *sadhu* sat down to his daily prayers and suddenly discovered, to his great horror, the silver tumbler. At once, he rushed to his host of the previous evening and said, "I have never in my life done such a thing. I really do not know what had possessed me to commit such a heinous deed. Can you tell me who had cooked the food last night?"

The headman replied that it had been the neighbour. On making discreet enquiries, the *sadhu* and the headman discovered that the lady was a kleptomaniac. Her tendencies had been introduced through her cooking into the *sadhu*! (Story adopted from "Chinna Katha" by Sri Sathya Sai Baba)

So friends, always make it a point to eat food cooked by one of your own family members - wife, mother, daughter or sister. Never employ cooks even if you are very rich. And, as far as possible, avoid eating in hotels or restaurants; that is , if you are aspiring to lead a spiritual life.

Another factor I would like to stress on is the purity of the provisions used to cook the food, as well as the purity of the money with which it is bought. If the provisions have been paid for with ill-gotten money, they can only harm you and if they have been bought from a dishonest merchant, they can be equally harmful. So consider all these factors carefully when purchasing your foodstuffs.

Sathwic diet does not merely mean *sathwic* food alone. It includes being *sathwic* in your other sensory activities too, like *sathwic* speech, not listening to evil talk etc.

"By regulating your diet and avoiding certain bad habits, you can preserve health. Moderate food and food of the sathwic type will promote mental poise and also physical happiness. Mitha-ahara is always to be welcomed. Many people consume more than the necessary quantity or eat too rich food, and as such have to practise moderation. So too, if you do not smoke, you escape a number of illnesses that follow that rajasic practice. Any intoxicant or stimulant, which disturbs nature's even trend, is harmful. Moderation in food, moderation in talk, and in desires and pursuits; contentment with what can be got by honest labour, eagerness to serve others and to impart joy to all - these are the most powerful of all the tonics and health-preservers known to the science of health, the Sanathana `ayur-veda', the veda of the full life".

"Sathwic food, according to some, consists of milk and fruits. But it is much more; it may not even be these. For, the calories that one takes in through the mouth are but a small part of the intake of man. The intake by the senses are part of the food that builds the individual. The sounds heard, the sights seen, the tactile impressions sought or suffered, the air breathed, the environment that presses for attention, apreciation and adoption all these are `food'. They have considerable impact on the character and career of the individual.

The quality of the food is determined by the vibrations that it is charged with, through the thought processes of the persons who handle, prepare and serve it. The 17th chapter of the Gita clearly defines the nature and tastes of the three types of 'food' eaten by man. The food that promotes love, virtue, strength, happiness and cordiality is sathwic; that which inflames, arouses, intoxicates and heightens hunger and thirst is rajasic; the food that depresses, disrupts and causes disease is thamasic. The company in which food is consumed, the place, the vessels in which it is cooked, the emotions that agitate the mind of the person who cooks it and serves it; all these have subtle influences on the nature and emotions of the persons who take the final product in! It is because the sages of India had realized this that they laid down so many do's and

don'ts for the process of eating, as for the different stages of spiritual progress".

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Recommended Reading on Sathwic Food and Health-
Know Thyself - by Gerad T. Satvic.
Satvic Food and Health - By Gerad T. Satvic.

Q - What exactly is *Ekagratha*, Swamiji?

S - *Ekagratha* is one-pointedness or singlemindedness; following your set path, practising your *Sadhana* with the greatest concentration and not getting distracted or diverted.

"Let the mind Dwell on God. Let it see all as God. That is described as one-pointedness. If it is so fixed, it will give up its tendency to search for faults and foibles in others; it will not run after the foul and the frivolous; it will not accumulate the trivial and the transitory. The body is as the container of the torch; the senses are the bulb, the mind is the cell; but, have the intelligence as the switch. Then, it will not be turned towards the undesirable. It will be used only to help man's progress towards the Divine destiny"

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Q - What is Spiriutal *Seva, Swamiji*?

S - Spiritual *Seva* is guiding another on the spiritual path, setting his footsteps on to the right path, the pathway to God. The *sevak* is helping the other in his search Spiritually and not by giving him financial or other assistance.

Q - How does one keep the mind free from all *vasanas*, passions, Swami?

S - By keeping a control over the five senses. This is called *Indriyanigraha*. The five senses are sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. If you follow the maxim - "See no evil, hear no evil, talk no evil," you have achieved 80% of your objective. Make it a policy never to gossip, or speak ill of others, never to listen to malicious talk or gossip, never to read trashy or vulgar books or see bad movies; watch TV

only moderately. I suppose in these days, a *Swami* would not dare to tell his disciples to totally abstain from watching TV! Eat only simple or sathwic food cooked with a minimum of oil; spices and chillies.
If you severely and strictly discipline yourself in this manner, your mind will be free of all passions and will be ready for *Dhyanam*. Next question, please.

Q - What is *Saranagathi, Swami* ?
S - Casting yourself at the Lord's Feet and seeking shelter and refuge there; seeking consolation from the Lord in all your worries and problems.

Q - *Swami,* can you tell us something about the different kinds of *Bhakthi?*
S - There are five types of *Bhakthi.* 1). The kind where the devotee looks upon the Lord as Father and Mother, examples - Ramdas looked upon God as his Father, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa looked upon God as the Holy Mother - he worshipped the Goddess Kali as his Mother.
2). The second is *Shantha Bhakthi.* This is a calm sort of devotion like the affection between two friends. Here, the Lord is looked upon as one's best friend and companion. Example, the love that Arjuna had for Lord Krishna.
3). *Vatsalya Bhakthi* or looking upon the Lord as one's own child, having maternal feelings for Him and wanting to cherish, fondle and nurture Him. Examples of this form of *Bhakthi* are Kausalya, Yasoda and Devaki.
4). *Dasya Bhakthi*, where the devotee deems himself to be the servant of the Lord and serves Him loyally and faithfully, in the way that Hanuman served Rama.
5). *Madhura Bhakthi*, where the Lord is looked upon as the sweet heart, Lover, Divine Beloved and Husband. This last form of devotion is the highest and most sublime of all and is the final stage before merging. Examples - Meera and Radha. Next question, please.

Q - *Swami*, can you tell me about the nine stages of Bhakthi?
S - Yes, the *Navavidha Bhakthi* or 9 types of *Bhakthi* are

1. *Sravanam* or letting the Divine vibrations of the *Omkar* fill the atmosphere.
2. *Kirtanam* - having the Divine Name dancing on the lips always.
3. *Smaranam* - always contemplating the Form, Glory and Majesty of the Divine.
4. *Padasevanam* - serving God by serving mankind.
5. *Archanam* - Propitiation of the Lord through systematic rites and rituals.
6. *Vandanam* - seeing and revering everything as God.
7. *Dasyam* - serving the Lord like a slave to his master.
8. *Sakhyam* - Seeing the Lord as Friend, Philosopher and Guide
9. *Atma nivedanam* - surrendering oneself entirely to the Lord.

Q - Swami, in the olden days, kings and others used to perform *yagnas* and *yagas* for their spiritual and material betterment. In the modern times, however, this is very difficult. Is it really necessary to do all those things?

S - In the olden days, foodstuffs were very pure and worthy of being offered to God. But nowadays most things are adulterated or 'enriched' or have preservatives or other chemicals added to them. Besides which, foodstuffs like milk and butter may have been refrigerated for days. Ghee is most often stale. Grains are not from our own fields, but have to pass through the hands of so many middlemen. Sandalwood, silk and precious stones which used to be put into the sacrificial fire in the olden days are today very costly and far beyond the affording power of most people. And time is the most precious commodity of all! In today's retrace, does man have two or three days to spare for a *yagnam*? No, he has no casual leave left or his boss refuses to sanction any. So, the entire purpose of *Yagna* has been lost.

Instead, the Lord Himself has given a new method of worship for the *Kaliyuga*. In this age of rampant materialism and mechanical living, there is no better means of worshipping the Lord than to chant His Name continuously; letting His Name dance continually on the tongue. Chant the Name with your lips, chant it in your mind. This *Namasmarana* will bring you your desired objective. *Namasmarana* also includes *Bhajans* and *Nagarasankiratan*. *Bhajan* means groups singing together in praise of the Lord.

Nagarsankirathan is a group of people walking around the village or town in the early hours of the morning singing *Bhajans* and awakening the people.

Q - Why does the Lord incarnate on earth from time to time? And why does He do so in human form? Why not come down on earth as *Brahma, Vishnu* or *Shiva*?

S - In order to answer the appeal of the pious, the good, the holy men, the seekers of truth, the Lord incarnates on earth from time to time. He also incarnates to destroy evil and to restore *Dharma* or righteousness. He incarnates in human form, in order to move freely among men and women.
If the Lord were to descend on earth with four arms, with a lotus, a mace, and a conch in them, or with four heads, you would either flee from Him in utter terror or put Him in a museum or a circus! Besides, the Lord has come in order to show you how to lead your lives as men and women, and as such, He should live the life of a model, exemplary human being and set the example for others. Is that not so ?

Q - Is it necessary for God to incarnate on earth to save mankind, is not mere will enough?

S - By mere *Sankalpa* or the lifting or a finger, God can save mankind. But that is not His intention. He incarnates, not to save the world, for He could do that with a mere wave of His Hand but in order to show man the way to save his own world. That again is His Divine Leela, that man shall have free will and the choice whether to save his own world or not.

Q - *Swami,* what is the best way of serving God?

S - The best way of serving God is by serving your fellowmen. "*Manav ki seva hi Madhav ki seva hai*".

Q - *Swamiji,* is it wrong for women to chant the *Gayathri Manthra* and other *manthras*?

S - No, not at all. All human beings are equal in the sight of God. When that is so, why would God differentiate between men and women? Women have equal rights with men to tread the spiritual path. As a matter of fact, woman is a few steps ahead of man in the path due to two reasons. One reason is by way of her nature

or *Swabhava* itself, which is one of sentiment, while man is more logical and scientific minded. Secondly, the *sthree* is like the Devi or Goddess Herself. A good woman is Lakshmi incarnate; merely by being an ideal wife and mother, she is discharging her debts; and as a Procreator of the human race, is herself almost Divine, herself akin to the Almighty Creator. As such, she needs very little more, either in the form of *manthras* or anything else, in order to find the Absolute Truth and merge in *Brahman.*

Q - *Swami*, is it necessary to give up family, friends and home and retire into an *ashram* in order to realise God?

S - No, never! What a height of foolishness! Is that what you have understood from my talks, young man? Oh! I think you are new here, I don't remember seeing you here before. In that case, I'll explain. God does not want you to forsake family and home, shirk your duties and responsibilities and run away into the forest or to an *ashram*. It is while leading the life of an ideal householder and member of society, that you should try to seek and realise God - through any of the three *Margas* or pathways - *karma* or service, *jnana* or knowledge and *Bhakthi* or devotion. Devotion to the Lord alone is not enough. We must learn to love everyone and not to hate any one. *Karma* surcharged with *Bhakthi* will itself lead to *jnana*.

Q - *Swami*, how should we pray to the Lord? How should we address Him?

S - Treat the Lord as your greatest friend, your playmate, your father or mother or *guru,* your beloved, your husband or even as your child. See Him in any form that you like. Speak to Him and address Him in any way that you like, only do not be ponderous and formal, do not posit any distance between Him and you. Be natural and sincere, yearn for Him, talk to Him, talk with Him, talk at Him. During every moment you can spare, cry out God! God!

Talk to Him of your aspirations,
Tell Him your expectations.
Turn to Him with your misfortunes,
Skip gaily to Him with your good fortunes,
Speak to Him of your worries and troubles,
Let Him know of your follies and foibles.

Do not conceal anything from God -
But pour your heart out to the Lord.
This is how you pray to the Lord-informally, intimately,
Let every moment in your life be a prayer to Him,
Let every act you perform, be to Him a dedication,
And every thought that crosses your mind, to Him a veneration.
Spend your life in utter God-adoration.

"If you want God, want Him with all your heart. He cannot and will not accept less than one hundred percent surrender on the part of His devotee. Love Him with all your heart, mind and soul. And don't be satisfied until you have that Divine Love. Cry to God night and day; talk to him, unceasingly, be drunk all the time with the desire for Him, and you will see how wonderfully life changes for you".

- Sri Sri Daya Mata

GOD IS THE GREATEST TREASURE.

"When you are lonely, cry to your Heavenly Father. When you yearn for understanding, run to Him. Man has little idea of what a tremendous friend, what a tremendous Father-Mother-Beloved is seeking his love!

But you have to seek Him first. He will not impose Himself on His children; He waits for them to seek Him. He will push in your path everything but Himself. He will offer constantly all kinds of substitutes, waiting to see if you will be content with them. If you are, you remain at a standstill on the spiritual path. But the wise devotee, like a naughty child, pushes aside every toy, every bauble of wordly attraction and goes on crying for the Lord. Such a devotee finds God; none else finds Him.

Be hungry for Him within, every moment. Be on fire for God. Convert all of your craving into one massive flame of desire for the Lord. All your limitations will be consumed in that emancipating flame".

- Sri Sri Daya Mata

"This is my prayer to you my Lord
I place my head at Your Feet .
Let my body be where it likes,
But let my mind always rest at Your Feet -
Let me spend my time thinking of you."

- Saint Tukaram

"O Divine Beloved, I have nothing to offer Thee,
For all things are Thine.
I grieve not that I cannot give,
For nothing is mine, nothing is mine.
Here I lay at Thy Feet
My limbs, my life, my thoughts and speech;
For they are Thine, for they are Thine."

- Sri Sri Paramahamsa Yogananda

"God is my strength, God is my Love, God is my Friend, God is my Beloved, my only one. When He is absent from me, I am bereft of everything; I am a beggar. When He is with me, I am filled with love and joy; I am filled with courage and strength".

- Sri Sri Daya Mata

"Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon....."

- St. Francis of Assist.

Q - Swami, how can we find God?

S - Through one or more of the three *margas* that I have already told you about. Through *seva* or selfless service, through *jnana* or knowledge or through *bhakthi* by controlling the senses and the mind, and withdrawing the mind from material affairs. God cannot be known though the senses, or be measured by the limited intellect. If we try to discover His Bliss, Love and Wisdom in the sensory world, we will only be disappointed. But when we learn by deep meditation to still our bodies and shut off the five senses,

our sixth sense or intuition begins to express himself. God can be known only through this intuition.

Every man is endowed with intuition. Our first aim, therefore, is to quieten both body and mind, so that the whispers of intuition may be heard. If God does not respond to us, it is because we do not feel sufficient yearning for Him and have not learnt how to meditate deeply. When we sit to meditate, we must try to keep our minds as blank as possible, free from all troubles, thoughts or even stray ones. This can be done if we learn how to concentrate and through the practice of *yoga.*

Secondly, we must develop humility. The ego, the 'I' consciousness must go. Until then we cannot fill the consciousness with thoughts of God. *Ahamkara* is the greatest enemy of spirituality. Where there is arrogance, there is no place for Godly feelings. So, first empty your mind of ego and arrogance.

Thirdly, we must do *Chitha-suddhi* or cleansing of the mind. This we can do by ridding ourselves of all bad thoughts and emotions, emptying our mind totally of such feelings and filling it instead with love, good thoughts and a spirit of service. To achieve this, we had best follow the maxim: 'Hear no evil', 'see no evil' and 'speak no evil'. If we become *sathwic* in nature, then we will be rid of all arrogant and slothful tendencies. Only then can we try to attune ourselves to the Divine.

We must surrender ourselves body, heart and mind to God.How do we do this? By offering the fruits of all our actions to the Lord, thinking always that HE is the Doer and that we are but the instruments.

We must be content to make progress slowly and not expect results within a few days or weeks or months. God will not manifest Himself to us until He is convinced that our love for Him, our yearning for Him is total and unconditional. When He knows that we want only Him and will not be palmed off with any lesser gift or be tempted by the lure of fame and name or the dazzle of riches, then and only then does He reveal Himself to us. When a baby cries, the mother tries to placate it with playthings, but if the naughty child keeps flinging all the toys onto the floor and goes on crying for the mother, what other option has she, but to go to him and pick him up? We must be like that naughty child -stubborn and refuse to be fobbed off with a lesser prize, insisting that we want only God.

Then, surely, God will respond.

Q - Swamiji, how far is man the master of his own destiny? How much is free will and how much is already ordained or pre-determined by his past *karma*?

S- Have you heard the English proverb, " As you sow, so shall you reap?" Well, the entire law of the universe is based on this principle. The way in which you act, the manner in which you act, the manner in which you behave will determine the future. It is like Newton's law. "Every action has an equal and opposite reation, resound and reflection."

The world is like a mirror. If you stand in front of the mirror and smile, the reflection will smile back at you. But if you make horrible grimaces, you will only get back equally horrid contortions.

So, it is a concept of cause and effect actually. If you perform good and meritorious deeds, you will incur good *Karma,* and a happy future awaits you ; but if you indulge in sinful acts, then you incur bad *karma* and only misery will befall you.

God has bestowed on us the gift of free will,. It is entirely up to us whether we indulge in good acts or in wicked and shameful ones. If we perform good and meritorious acts, we shall be blessed with joy and peace in the future; but if we indulge in sinful deeds, we shall incur only a miserable future. So, the choice of how to act is in our hands entirely, but the result is not. The result will be ordained by the act itself. So, it is right to say that it is entirely up to us, whether we incur good or bad *karma*.The comforts and joys we are experiencing in the present are but the merits of good deeds we had performed in the past life. Similarly, the untold miseries and agonies we are undergoing are also a result of sinful acts our in the past life. A helpless cripple may bemoan his fate saying that he has led an entirely blameless life in this *janma*, so why should such a horrible tragedy befall him? This man may have committed some foul deeds in his past birth. But, by behaving in an exemplary manner now, he can, to a certain extent, mitigate his past bad karma and ensure at least joy and peace in his next *janma.* Why, a sudden and miraculous cure may even be affected and he may find himself able to walk!

Very often, the good or bad times we are passing through now are the result of good or bad actions indulged in during a previous

birth. We can mitigate or nullify the effects of bad karma by our present good behaviour. This will help us to create good *karma* for the future. If, therefore, we keep in mind that we are actually plotting the course of our future in this birth and in the next, we will surely be careful in avoiding all sinful acts and will perform only good deeds, meritorious acts, charitable works, will we not ? Next question, Please.

Q - *Swami*, is there a reason why a child is born to a particular set of parents, or is it merely by accident or random selection?

S - No, it is not by random selection. There are three reasons why a child is born to a particular set of parents.
1) The child may be having an undischarged debt towards the parents from a previous birth,
2) The parents may be remaining under a past *karmic* obligation towards the child.
3) There may be a mutual karmic debt between the two.
In order to fulfil these obligations or to repay these debts, the child is born to the particular set of parents. Is that quite clear? Shall we proceed to the next question, please?

Q- *Swami*, does the *karma* of the parents influence that of the child? Are the two bound up together?

S- Not directly, because each person makes his or her own *karma* and is responsible for his or her actions alone. But, to a certain extent, the behaviour of the parent can determine the behavioural pattern of the child. If the parent is of a good character and brings up the child in a befitting manner, then the child will perform only right actions and therefore will reap good *karma* for both this life and the next. If, on the other hand, the parent's character is bad, then the child may indulge in bad behaviour which will incur bad *karma* for him in this birth and in the next.But all this relates to the behaviour in this *janma* alone. The *karma* incurred by the parents in a past life, will not - I repeat - will not affect the *karma* of the child in this *janma.*
There is one factor, however. A certain child may be ordained by its *karma* to be born as a cripple. Then, it will be born to parents whose *karma* dictates that they undergo the sorrow of having a crippled child. It is not that the *karma* of the parents has caused

the child to become a cripple. It is that the *karmas* of both have been matched and the one has been born to the other.

Let me quote another example. A certain couple's *karma* ordains that they are to suffer the anxiety of having an unmarried daughter. There is also a babe whose *karma* dictates that she remain unmarried. So this child is born to that set of parents. It is a case of demand and supply, actually.

Q - *Swamiji*, what are *Prarabdha karma* and *Sanchitha karma*?

S - *Prarabdha karma* is the *karma* you have incurred in your past lives. *Sanchitha karma* is the *karma* you are undergoing now. It is in your own hands, whether you incur good or bad *karma* now.

Q - Swami, what are the qualities of a true of a true devotee?

S - A true devotee feels love not only towards the Lord, but towards all beings . He will be suffused with the spirit of *seva* or service. He will indulge only in good works and charitable acts. Above all, he will be humble and ever- ready to serve others. Humility is the hallmark of a true devotee. Arrogance is the enemy of spirituality. If arrogance comes in through one door, spirituality goes out through the other.

A true devotee would have surrendered everything to the Lord. There are no half measures about it. He has given his all to the Lord and will not angle for a fifty-fifty partnership. Nowdays, many so-called *Bhakthas* say, "Half is for you and the other half is for me, oh God." What utter nonsense is that! You either give everything to the Lord or keep it all, but don't bargain. Devotion nowdays has become a part - time affair, just like the fashionable part-time jobs! Housewifes and others take up part-time jobs, because they do not impose too great a strain on them and they can still enjoy themselves too. In the same way, they take up part-time devotion, leaving the rest of their time for fun and enjoyment. This is utter ignorance and insolence. We have to be steeped in thoughts of God always, even when we are engaged in doing our daily chores. There can be no half measures about it. Otherwise, forget about the whole thing and do not even profess to be a devotee.

A true devotee will rest his. mind at the Lord's Lotus Feet. Surrendering himself and everything to Him, He will look to God

as Father, Mother, *Guru*, Friend, Philosopher, Guide, Beloved, Sweetheart or Husband. And the Lord will take care of him, provide for him and grant him *Moksha* or liberation.

Q - *Swamiji*, Why do we say that we are but the instruments of God?

S - God is the real Doer. We are but the instruments or tools. He is the Producer and Director of the great Cosmic Play and we are but actors enacting the roles allotted to us. It is our duty to enact these roles to the best of our ability, never forgetting even for a moment that we are mere actors, just instruments of the Supreme Producer - Director. Once we get that idea firmly fixed in our minds, we wil not stoop to performing bad deeds, for fear of maligning or displeasing that Producer-Director. We will also develop an attitude of humility that we ourselves are nothing but instruments of God.

Q - When they know that God is everywhere, why do people flock to see *Avatars* like Sathya Sai Baba and have their *Darshan*?

S - Sunlight is pouring down on you throughout the day and you can bathe or bask in it all day long. But the early marning sunrays are specially charged and are irradiating and health giving. So too, although God is indeed everywhere, when He comes down to earth in human form, that physical form is charged with special vibrations and energy. We should not lose the chance to drink in that special energy and absorb those vibrations.

Q - What is self-realization?

S- When we sit for a while in utter solitude, turning our minds inwards in introspection, pondering all the while on who we are and what we are, a process of self-enquiry is set in motion. Gradually, day by day, the mind becomes quieter and quieter, until there comes the stage when it is entirely silent and still, and in this stillness and calmness, comes the knowledge of *Brahman*, the realization of the self and who we really are. That is self-realization. Self-realization is found only in inner silence. It means the union of the soul with God.

Q - Swami, how can you judge your progress spiritually, how can you know how far you have advanced in the spiritual path?

S- The best way is through self-analysis. Analyse your thoughts. Are they pure and *sathwic* or egoistic and arrogant, full of *Rajas*, or are they slothful and *thamasic*? Similarly, analyse and question each action of yours. Compare your thoughts, acts and behaviour of today with those of a year ago. Have you since then become more humble, more pure in thought, word and deed? Ask yourself, analyse yourself and you will know. Your conscience is the best guide. Also, the tranquility of your mind will tell you if you are reaching your goal. If you have succeeded in curbing your *vasanas* and passions, your mind will be calm and quiet - otherwise, it will be a raging tumult of conflicting emotions. Is that clear? Next question, please.

Q - Is it true that God fulfils all our desires?

S - Sooner or later, God fulfils all our desires, provided they are ethically right ones. But first we must develop the attitude of total surrender. We must begin to yearn only for God and cease to want anything else, forgetting all material wants and desires. We must be intoxicated with thoughts of God, basking in His Glory all the while.We should clamour incessantly for God, not settling for anything less. And do you know what happens? When we realise God, He begins to supply us with all the things we had ever asked for, even though we are no longer interested in them, but only in Him. Every single want or craving of ours is fulfilled, even that craving for chocolate cake or the dream to visit Kashmir or the desire to ride on an elephant! "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all other things shall be added unto you." Thus spoke Jesus Christ.

Q - *Swami,* I have heard that there is an auspicious moment even for death. Is that true?

S - Yes, that's right. You see, each month is divided into two fortnights. *Shulka Paksha* is the bright fortnight or the period of the waxing moon. The moon is the diety presiding over the mind, hence when the moon is waxing, the mind is at the height of its spirituality. The next half of the month is the dark fortnight, *Krishna Paksha* or the period of the waning moon. *Krishna* means dark. During this period, spiritually will be at a lower ebb. Therefore, *Shukla Paksha* is a more auspicious time than *Krishna Paksha.*

Again, the year itself is divided into two periods - *Uttarayana* and *Dakshinayana*. *Uttarayana* is the first half of the year, mid-January to mid-June, when the sun is on its northward journey. the next half of the year, mid-June to Mid-January, is *Dakshinayana*, when the sun is on its southward course.

It is considered to be auspicious to die during the period of *Uttarayana*, in *Shukla Paksha* and in *Tejas* or light, that is during daytime, especially during the *Brahma Muhurtham*. All great *Rishis*, saints and *Tapasvis* and *Nishkama Karma* Yogis pass away during such on auspicious time. They merge in God and are not born again. The yogis who practice *Sakama Karma* die during *Dakshinayana*. They reach a Heaven where they can enjoy the fruits of their *karma*. When these are exhausted or spent, they are born again on earth. The wicked, the evil minded die during *Dakshinayana*, *Krishna Paksha* and in darkness or night. They reap only inauspicious results.

However, I must also point out that *Uttarayana, Dakshinayana, Shukla paksha* and *Krishna Paksha* are more a state of the mind than an actual geopraphical period or a period in time. A great and enlightned person is always in *Uttarayana* and *Shukla Paksha*, his mind is always lit - in *Tejas*. The mind of a wicked person is in darkness, in ignorance, in *tamas*- it is in *Dakshinayana* and *Krishna Paksha*. I hope this has been clearly understood. Are there any more questions, please?

Q - *Swami*, I have never been able to clearly understand the concept of *Vairagya*. Can you please explain?

S - *Vairagya* or detachment means loving others and serving them selflessly without getting involved with them, without being affected by their criticisim or praise. It does not mean not loving or not caring . It means loving and serving people regardless of their attitude and reaction towards us, heedless of their criticism or their praise. This is a difficult state to achieve. There's a vast difference between detachment and indifference or uncaring attitude. The two should not be confused. For example, there is a husband who ill - treats his wife. The wife should go on serving him fatithfully, not getting upset by his cruel behaviour. Her mind should be tranquil, calm, unruffled, undisturbed by his callous behaviour. Neither should she be cast into transports of joy if he

suddenly starts praising her. This is the attitude of real detachment, an atitude that's most difficult to achieve. It needs years of rigorous mental discipline and self-control.

Let me repeat once again - callousness or uncaring attitude is not detachment.

Allow me to quote a few of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's sayings to you. They will explain and elucidate.

"Do not get too fond of anyone or anthing. Do all your duties well. Give full joy to your parents and teachers. Help all as much as you can. But learn to keep quiet for some time every day and be calm when somthing happens in the way you do not like."

"When a plane flies across the sky, it leaves no mark on it, no streak that lasts, no furrow or pothole that interferes with further traffic. So too, allow all feelings and emotions to cross your mind, but do not allow them to cause an impression."

"Yoga and Thyaga are the two chief instruments of spiritual progress. By 'Thyaga' (sacrifice or detachment), you escape from pathetic entanglement with the objective world. By 'Yoga' (self-control), you attach yourself to the Divine Principle, that is immanent in the universe, in Truth, Beauty and Goodness, wherever found."

"Know the One, attention must be concentrated on the One. Let nothing move you, be still. Be detached, be but a witness. The world is but a play enacted by Him. Let your love and longing, desire and search be directed towards God."

"Get detached from the transitory pleasures, boldly attach yourself with the One, Peerless and Eternal, remaining in a serene state of Blissful Awareness."

"You must not be a bit of blotting paper, absorbing all the passions and emotions, all the joys and griefs that the actress nature demonstrates on the stage of Life. You must be a lotus unfolding the petals when the sun rises in the sky., unaffected by the slush where it is born or even the water which sustains it."

"Emotions come and go, pain is the place between two pleasures, pleasure is the place between two pains- transient, always changing. These come and go like waves in the ocean, like a breeze and we should not pay much atention to them. Remember you are unchanging, infinite, immortal."

"Do not get swelled up when people praise you and do not feel dejected when people blame you."

"Let the wave of memory, the storm of desire, the fire of emotion pass through without affecting your eqanimity. Be a witness to these. Commitment engenders holding - narrowing, limiting. Be willing to be nothing. Let all dualities subside in your neutrality."

I hope this has given you at least some idea of *Vairagya*, Are there any more questions, Please?

Q - *Swamiji*, during meditation, how does one control the mind and concentrate?

S - First of all, observe the rules I've already told you about, like *Sathwic* diet. Go to bed early and get up during the *Brahma Muhurtham*. Adopt the pose I have already told you about. Sit with your eyes closed and try to keep the mind as blank and quiet as possible. You will not attain this within a day, or even within a month. It needs weeks or months of long and patient endeavour. When thoughts cross your mind, do not pursue or chase them, but let them just flit across your mind. Be just an observer. Watch the thoughts, but do not pursue them.Let me give you an example. Imagine a child playfully running away from its mother. As long as the mother chases the child, it will naughtily run farther and farther away from her. But the minute the mother becomes indifferent and stops taking notice of the child, the child becomes piqued and will come running back to it's mother.

It is likewise with the mind also. So don't pursue your thoughts. but let them come and go. Sooner or later, your mind will become free of them and you will be able to concentrate.

Let me take this opportunity to bring home to you one other fact - one that I've not mentioned to you earlier. In meditation, there are three stages. The first is concentration or focussing your attention on the object - flame, picture, or *Manthra.* The second step is contemplation, or withdrawing the mind from all external objects and fixing it on the goal. The last and final stage is that of actual meditation, and this I cannot explain to you. You will have to experience it for yourselves. In meditation itself, there are various stages or depths. You will have to plumb these depths for yourselves and see. The last and final stage is that of awakening or self-realisation and of *Yoga* or union with God. It is a state of *Samadhi*. *Samadhi* is a state of oneness with God.

Q - *Swami,* you have explained to us quite clearly about the benefits of taking a diet that is *sathwic*. Can you also please tell us which foodstuffs are *sathwic* in nature and which aren't?

S - Milk and all milk products are *sathwic* in nature. So are fruits and roots and tubers. This is the reason why *rishis* and their disciples used to subsist mainly on a diet of milk, fruits, roots and tubers. Again you can safely eat all vegetables, as most of them are *sathwic* in nature. Of the dhals, green gram is the most *sathwic*, Tur or red gram dhal is not so good, while Bengal gram is not good at all, they produce gas or distension of the stomach. Pepper and jeera are the two most *sathwic* condiments and among the spices, cardomum is *sathwic*. Cloves and cinnamon are *rajasic* - they excite the passions. Onions and garlic are *thamasic* and as such are best to be totally avoided by the spiritual aspirant.

Most meats and eggs are *rajasic*. When an animal is about to be slaughtered for its meat, it trembles and cries in sheer terror. In such cases of terror, the *Adrenal* glands secrete an excess of the harmone, adrenalin, and this is released into the blood stream of the terrified animal. Just imagine! When we eat that animal, we will be imbibing all that excessive adrenalin, which is very bad for our emotions and health. So, if you are aspiring to the spiritual path, meat is completely a taboo to you.

Alcohol is *thamasic* as it is sleep and sloth-producing, besides causing a great deal of misery. This you all know about and I don't have to elucidate.

In general, a diet rich in milk and its products, and fruits and vegetables will be the one that is ideal for a *sadhaka*. Pongal and *Kichri* are very *sathwic* dishes. But even of these and other *sathwic* food, it is best to eat only moderately. Never over-load the stomach. There is a saying - one who eats only once a day is a *yogi*, one who eats twice is a *bhogi* and the one who eats three times a day is a *rogi*. Of course, I am not telling you to eat only once a day, but I am stressing only the fact that you should eat moderately. I hope this has been clear to you, my friends.

Q - Why is there so much sorrow and suffering in the world, Swami?

S - Because of the veil of Maya or delusion and the ignorance that blinds man. As long as man remains overly or unduly attached to the sensory and material world and to the people in it, he will be

filled with emotions like anger, sorrow, disillusionament, disenchntment and so on. But the moment he realizes that all this is temporaty, ephemeral, evanescent and that the only reality is his own Atma which is a part of the Paramathma, the grief vanishes. Be detached from life and it's sensory attractions. Be detached from life and it's sensory attractions. Be silent, a mere witness to this drama called life. Be attached only to the One Eternal, Changeless *Brahman.* Know that you and He are one and the same. Then, grief will never touch you.

Q - Swami, although many of us do know this truth in theory, we find it most difficult to practice. In spite of everything, we find ourselves sunk in gloom and sorrow. What should we do to put the theory into practice?

S - Just offer everything to the Lord. You are happy. Alright, offer that state of happiness to Him. You are miserable; offer the misery to Him too. Give up everything to Him - Joy, sorrow, pleasure, pain everything. Then slowly you begin to gain the state of equanimity, of equilibrium.

Q - Swami, I have heard it said that if a person dies with the Name of God on his lips, he merges in God. Is this true?

S - Yes. Whosoever shall remember the Lord with his last, dying breath, whosoever shall chant the Lord's Name at the moment of death, shall attain *Brahman*, he shall merge in Him. This is Lord Krishna's declaration in the *Bhagavad-Gita.*
However, this glorious state will not come to every one. A man who is steeped in *samasara* and emboriled in the coils of *Kama, Krodha, Madha* and *Lobha*, a man attached to the material rather than to the Divine, will never utter the Lord's Name with his dying breath. In order to chant the Holy Name at the time of death, a whole life-time, nay, even many life times of strict *Sadhana* and adoration of the Lord are essential. So start when you are young. Start right now, there's no time to waste.

Q - What do you say about the caste system, Swamiji?

S - The caste system was practised most successfully in the olden days. There were four varnas or classes, the *Brahmins* or the priestly class, the *Kshatriyas* or the warrior clan, the *Vaishyas*

or the tradesmen, and the *Sudras* or the agriculturists. This method of division was found to be very convenient in the olden days. A boy born of *Sudra* parents would not even think of a job other than agriculture. All this is changing today, however. With all the modern modes of fast travel, people are travelling all over the world and are coming under the influence of other cultures. There are intercaste and even international marriages. So, the original caste system is fast becoming out-dated. A *Kshatriya* may go for high studies like Ph.D. in Nuclear Physics and a *Brahmin* may be a successful cloth merchant.

When all is said and done actually, caste system is more a state of mind, a mode of behaviour rather than a water-tight compartmentalisation. A person who is immersed in *Brahman* all the time can therefore be called *Brahmana*. An individual who is always trying to safeguard the interests of society, who is ever crusading against evil-doers and protecting the interests of the virtuous can definitely be called a *Kshatriya* and so on. Have I been able to clarify your doubt, friend? Yes? I'm so glad.

Q - What is *Moksha*, Swamiji?

S - *Moksha* is liberation, liberation from the bondage of body and family, liberation from attachment to the material world. It is the attainment of the ever-existing, ever-stable, ever-pure *Atma-Thathwa*, getting rid of the ephemeral, transitory, ever unreal, impure *Dehathathwa*. *Moha* Plus *kshaya* is equal to *Moksha*.

Q - Swami, what are the characteristics of the *Atma*?

S - The *Atma* is a part of the *Paramatma*, just as droplets of water are part of the mighty ocean and grains of sand part of the vast desert.

As such, the nature of the *Atma* is *Ananda* or Bliss, *Sathyam* or Truth and immortality. The *Atma* knows no sorrow or pain, it is ever in a state of bliss. Amidst a world that is constantly changing, the *Atma* is the only substance which always was, is, and always will be. The physical body may die, but the *Atma* has no death; it is immortal. It is ageless; it always was and always will be.

What is the real 'I'? Is it the body, the mind, the limbs, the beautiful face? No, it is the *Atman*. You think the pant and shirt you wear or the saree you don belongs to you. But these are here today, gone tomorrow. When they are torn, you discard them, don't you,

and get a fresh set? Similarly, the body too yields to old age and death and you don a new body. But during the whole process, the *Atma* remains the same, it does not change. So, changelessness is a qualityof the *Atma.*

Since the *Atma* is but a part of the *Paramatma*, it stands to reason that the *Atma* in you is the same as the *Atma* in the next person. Once this is realised, feelings of malice and hatred will automatically disappear and you will begin to feel love towards one and all.

Q - What is the *Pranava*, Swami?

S - The *Pranava*, the *Omkar* is of primary importance. '*Aum*' is the primeval sound, the sound from which all creation arose. In the beginning, there was just a void, then came the vibrations of the *Omkar* and from it, all creation arose. Hence, it is important to do the *Omkaram* or chant the *Aum* everyday.

The '*Aum*' is the greatest and most important of all *manthras*. So it is always used as a prefix to other *Manthras*. One does not say just *'Namas Shivaya'* or *'Namo Narayana'*. One says '*Aum Namasshivaya*' or *'Aum Namo Narayana'*. In fact, the *Gita* says that if one concentrates the life-force or *prana shakthi* in the mid-eyebrow region and chants the '*Aum*' at the time of death, he is instantly released from all bondage and from the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, we must make it a habit to constantly chant the *Omkar* whenever we find time.

There is a way of chanting the *Aum*. The correct spelling is *AUM* and not *OM*. The reason is this - You pronounce it as *A-U-M*, the *A* starting from the stomach in the form of a deep rumble, the *U* comes from the throat and the *M* from the lips. The last should be a sort of buzzing noise like that of an aeroplane. But most people say the entire word merely with the lips. This is wrong.

Any more questions, please?

Q - What is the exact meaning of the word '*Manthra*'. Swami?

S - *MA* means *manana* and *THRA* means saving; so *manthra* means that which can save you if you meditate on it. *Manthra* will save you from being caught up in the coils of this worldly life which is infested with death, grief and pain. Of all *manthras*, the *Pranava* is the highest and the best. It is the head and crown of all the *manthras.*

Q - Swami, what is *San.adhi?*

S - *Samadhi* means the fixing of the mind which is free from all emotions, on the Lord, or on one's own Reality, the *Atma.* The mind will be in a state of total equanimity and equilibrium. The word 'Samadhi' means Sama-Buddhi, that is equanimity. It is a state of total oneness with God. The person will move about, carry out his activities, etc., totally unshaken by anything, his mind totally fixed on God.

Q - Swamiji, when one does *Atma Nivedanam,* that is total surrender to God, there is the danger of inactivity. How can we safeguard against that, Swami?

S - *Atma Nivedanam* or surrender to the Lord never meant and never will mean inactivety on your part, we have to put forth all our best endeavours in whatever we undertake - the spirit should be "I'll do my best and to God leave the rest." We have to act all the time, but surredner the fruits of our actions to God. We should not worry whether we will be successes or failures, as long as we do our best. God knows all and will do the rest.

If you are studying for your BA examinations, will you say "I have surrendered my all to God, so why should I study? He will surely make me pass," and go and enjoy yourselves at the movies? Certainly not. You'll work hard. God helps those who help themselves. But your very sincerity and hard work will please God and your attitude of surrender will please Him even more and He will surely bless you with success.

When you surrender everything to Him, you become free of doubts and worries for the future, you develop the greatest trust and confidence in the Lord and consequently in yourself and when you reach this stage, you become tranquil and leave everything to God. And the Lord will take care of you and will crown your efforts with success.

Q - Swamiji, what are *Kama, Krodha, Moha, Madha, Lobha* and *Matsarya*?

S - *Kama* or desire or lust; *Krodha* or anger; *Moha* or delusion that you are this physical body; *Lobha* or greed; *Madha* or egoism, Arrogance and *Matsarya* or envy, jealousy are the *Vasanas* or passions that harass man.

Q - Swami, can you briefly explain *Kundalini Yoga* and the *Chakras*?

S - *Kundalini Yoga* is a type of *Dhyanam* which uses the *Kundalini* force. *Kundalini* is the latest force (*pranashakthi*) in the human body. It is supposed to lie coiled up like a serpent at the base of the spine. This energy is present in everyone of us. Our task is to raise it from its lowest level (in the *Mooladhara chakra*) to the highest level (in the *Sahasrara*). The spirituality of an individual is therefore directly proportional to the rising of the *Kundalini*. The *Kundalini* lies near the lowest point or *chakra*, which is the *Mooladhara*.

Technically there are eight *chakras*.

1) The *Mooladhara chakra* is the lowest point and is said to be the seat of the sleeping *Kundalini*. It is situated at the base of the spinal cord at a point corresponding to the excretory organs.

2) The *Swadihstana chakra* is situated near the pubic bone.

3) The *Manipura chakra* is situated in the solar plexus, behind the navel.

4) The *Anahate Chakra* lies in the cardiac plexus, that is in the region of the heart.

5) The *Visuddhi chakra* is situated in the hollow of the throat. It is known as the purification centre, where poisons and nectar are separated and refined.

6) The *Ajna chakra* is situated near *Brumadhya* or the mid-point of the eyebrows. As the word '*Ajna*' means command, it is obvious that this is the centre where messages and instructions are received from the *guru*.

7) The *Bindu chakra* is situated at the back of the head, where *Brahmins* traditionally wear a tuft of hair. (Not all, however, deem this to be a major chakra)

8) The *Sahasrara* or the thousand petalled lotus at the top of the head is the subtlest of the *chakras*. It is the culmination of the *Kundalini*, which may be taken to be *Shakthi* or the female force. The Sahasrara is the abode of *Shiva, Purusha* or the Male Force. When *Shakthi* or *Kundalini* ascends to the *Sahasrara* and unites with *Shiva*, a great awakening is experienced and a new level of consciousness is reached.

The *Ajna chakra* is a particularly sensitive point. This is the real reason why Hindus wear the *Bindi*, as the dangers of hypnotism and the evil eye are thereby lessened. It stands to reason then,

that the *Bindi* is effective only when worn exactly in the *Brumadhya* or the mid-eyebrow region. The black *Bindi*, in particular, is supposed to be efficatious in warding away evil.

Now, friends, there's time for just one more question. After that, I'm afraid I have to stop.

Q - A young smartly dressed man stood up. "Swami", he begin hesitantly, " I have always wanted to ask this question of a knowledgeable person, but have not had the courage to do so, as the topic is a somewhat sensitive one. However, since you have just mentioned the *Ajna chakra* and the *Bindi*, I have mustered enough courage to ask. Is it not unfair for a widow to be forced to stop wearing the *Bindi*, to have to abstain from wearing flowers or bangles?

S - Yes, I personally think it most unfair - and for three reasons. Firstly, it is the birth-right of every woman to wear a *bindi*, flowers, bangles and other feminine accessories. She wears these from childhood itself and not after her marriage alone. So, why should she remove them if her husband dies?

Secondly, does her husband cease to be her husband after he dies? Is he not in her heart still? Does she cease to be his wife? Suppose a man were to go abroad. Does the wife have to remove her bindi etc? Smilarly, when he dies, it is only his physical body that is absent. His *Atma* is immortal and he is ever present in the thoughts of his loved ones. What kind of justice then insists on the poor wife removing all her finery, and above all her *bindi*, the lack of which will only remind her of her loss and taunt her most cruelly.

Thirdly, the *bindi*-less and unadorned face of a woman will proclaim to the world at large her defenceless condition and this would be dangerous for her. The widow needs, more than other women, to wear a *bindi,* particularly a black one, to ward off the evil eye and the lascivious glances of men.

This is a highly controversial and delicate topic, however, and I wouldn't be quite surprised if a few rotten tomatoes were to land squarely on my face!

My dear children, it is getting very late. Shall we stop this question and answer session now? I hope I'll have the chance of being with you all again some time. Maybe, it will be so. Who knows? It's all God's will. Meanwhile, may God bless you all, my dears

and may you soon attain the Highest Wisdom. *Hari Aum Tat Sat.*"

Amid thunderous applause, the *Swamiji* descended from the platform and preceeded towards the gate. He was overtaken by an eager Prashant. "Swamiji, you promised to lend me the book `*Sai Upadesh*', he reminded eagerly. "So I did," Swami smiled. " I haven't forgotten. Here it is." He handed over the volume to Prashant. "It's a book of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's teachings, compiled in alphabetical order. I find it a great help, as each time I want to look up Baba's quotation on a particular topic, all I have to do is to look it up under that alphabet. Well, young man, I think a great transformation has come over you. When I first met you, you were restless, torn and riddled by doubts, not at peace with yourself and belying your own name. But now, you have come to terms with yourself and with the world, haven't you? And you have succeeded in your quest, discovered yourself and finally found peace. At long last, you are really beginning to live up to your name of Prashant, young man. May you always be at peace with yourself and with the rest of the world".

Taking leave of the Swami, Prashant took the book home and spent many days avidly perusing it. A great and overwhelming desire possessed him to see Sri Sathya Sai Baba for himself. So taking a week's casual leave, he proceeded to Prasanthi Nilayam along with his wife, Nilima.

He was given a room in the ashram and after setting down, he and his wife went for their first *Darshan* of the Baba.

One look at Baba and Prashant knew that he had come home at last. His long weary trek had finally ended and his tired, questioning mind had at last found its sanctuary and destiny.

Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi.

21. ON THIS BOOK

Dear friends,

You will be labouring under the greatest misapprehension if you think that it is I, Usha, who wrote this book. No indeed! It was my most Beloved *Guru* and Lord, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who inspired and led me, who guided and drove me, who , in fact, practically dictated to me and made this book a living reality. The very reason I call myself '*Sai Usha*' on the cover of this book, is that it was written by Sai via Usha, the instrument or the channel. I hope that I have been a worthy channel, the channel through which Baba has poured His Priceless Pearls of Wisdom, His Precious Panacea to all His dear children.

I don't think it was Baba's wish, nor was it mine to write page after ponderous page, chapter after monotonous chapter of dry *vedantic* lore. Who in these days will have the time to pour over heavy tomes and dusty volumes of scriptures? I think my Swami's intention is to give a few simple and straight guideliness to all those who are floundering on the pathway to God, eager to reach their destination, but unaware or unsure of the proper road. His concise description of the three *Margas- Karma, Bhakthi* and *Jnana*, are like Manna from Heaven, which indeed they are. Aren't we the luckiest, the most fortunate, the most blessed people of all times, to have God Incarnate, the *Yugavathar* Sri Sathya Sai Baba Himself as our spiritual *Guru* and Guide?

My dear brothers and sisters, it is my sincere hope that this book has been some sort of help to you in your spiritual search. Swami's teachings through the Swamiji would surely have made a considerable impact on you - because we are all like our young hero Prashant, searching, searching for Truth, floundering on the way, eager for guidance and longing to reach the goal. My dear friends, I remain to serve you in Sai *Prema* and *Seva.*

- Sai Usha

Asathoma Sadgamaya
Thamasoma Jyothirgamaya
Mrthyorma Amruthangamaya.
Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi

From ignorance, lead us to knowledge, from darkness lead us unto light, from death lead us to immortality.

Hari Aum Tat Sat
Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu
Aum Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthihi.

Guru Brahmaa Gurur Vishnu Gurur Devo
Maheshvarah
Guruh Sakshat Para Brahma
Tasmai Shree Gurave Namah

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aum	- the primeval sound out of which all creation arose
Abhisekham	- bathing an idol or deity with milk, honey, water, oil, etc.
Ahara	- Food
Ahimsa	- Non-violence
Ananda	- Bliss, joy
Annadana	- gift of food, usually rice,to the poor
Arjuna	- a character in the *Mahabharata*, son of Kunti, one of the five Pandava brothers
Asana	- a posture, an exercise in Yoga
Ashram	- abode of holy men, sages, rishis and saints, a sort of monastery,, a religious sanctuary or retreat
Atma	- the inner core, the Reality
Atma thathwa	- the atma principle
Avatar	- incarnation of God, Godman
Ayah	- child's nurse
Ayur-veda	- A branch of medicine which uses herbs and oils for curing
Bandhu	- relation

Bhagavad-Gita - Song of God, The Holy Book of the Hindus narrated by Lord Krishna to Arjuna

Bhajan - Songs on God

Bhagavan - God

Bhakthi - Devotion to God, faith in God, love for God

Brahma - the Creator, one of the Holy Trinity in Hinduism. The Trinity is Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara or Shiva

Brahmacharya - in the lay sense it means celibacy. The deeper meaning is detachment from the sensory world

Brahma Muhurtham - Time of Brahma, considered auspicious in the early morning hours, between 3 A.M. and 6 A.M.

Brindavan - abode of Krishna

Buddha - one of the ten Avatars, patron saint of Buddhism. Buddha means the enlightned one

Chitha Shuddhi - Purification of the mind

Darshan - sight of a holy person

Dashavatar - the ten Incarnations of Vishnu

Dayamata - Sangamatha and President of the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India/Self- realization Fellowship

Deva - God

Devi - Goddess

Dhals - Lentils, pulses rich in protein, used extensively in vegetarian cooking

Dharma	- Morality, ethical codes of life
Dharma pathni	- lawfully wedded wife
Dhyanam	- Meditation
Discourse	- religious lecture
Draupadi	- wife of Arjuna, the pandava. Daughter of King Drupada
Durbar	- King's court.
Ekagratha	- one-pointedness, single-mindedness
Ganesha	- Hindu God invoked always at the beginneng of every worship. Son of Shiva and Parvati, sporting an elephant's head
Gayathri Manthra	- Formulated by the ancient famed sage Vishwamitra. It is a prayer to the Goddess Savitur who is the splendour of the sun. One of the most important manthras, it is usuaslly imparted during Upanayanam or Initiation ceremony of Hindus
Gopas and Gopis	- simple cowherd lads and maidens during the time of Lord Krishna
Gunas	- qualities, attributes, characteristics
Guru	- Preceptor, guide
Hrydaya	- heart
Hiranyakashipu	- an evil demon, father of Prahlada, a great devotee of Vishnu
Ishta Devta	- One's favourite God form

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Ishta Devta	- One's favourite God form

Indriyas - the five senses

Indriyanigraha - control of the senses

Japam - repetition of the Lord's Name

Janma - birth

Jeera - a condiment used in cooking (cumin)

Jeevanam - life

Jivatma - individual soul

Jnana - knowledge

Jnani - one who has knowledge

Jyothi - light

Kalas - attributes

Kaliyuga - the present era, the Kali Age.

Kama - desire, lust

Karma - action, service

Karmaphala - the fruits of action

Karma phala thyaga - sacrificing the fruits of actions

Karma Yogi - one who is always serving others

Kauravas - characters in the *Mahabharata*, a great Indian epic.

Kerala - a state in South India

Koran - Holy Book of the Muslims

Krishna - Incarnation of Visnhu. He is one of the Ten Avatars

Krodha - anger

Kshatriya - warrior

Kurukshetra - battlefield of the great Mahabharata war waged between the Pandavas and the Kauravas

Lakshmi - Goddess of wealth, consort of Vishnu

Lakshmana - brother of Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu

Levitation - floating in space

Lobha - greed

Madha - arrogance, ego

Madhava - God

Madurai - one of the most ancient cities of South India, housing the famous Meenakshi temple

Madhura - Sweet

Madhura Bhakthi - a sweet sublime form of devotion in which the devotee looks upon the Lord as Sweet-heart, Lover, Husband

Maha-Samadhi - death and merging of a great person in God.

Manava - man

Mandir - temple

Manthra	- a form of prayer
Marga	- pathway, road, route
Matsarya	- envy, jealousy
Maya	- delusion
Meenakshi	- Goddess Parvathi
Meera	- a Rajput princess and great devotee of Krishna
Mitha ahara	- moderate food
Moha	- attatchment to worldly things and to people
Moksha	- liberation
Mysore pak	- a sweet made in gram flour
Nagar-sankirtan	- itinerant group singing of bhajans, a group of people going round a locality in the early hours of the morning, singing Bhajans
Namasmarana	- chanting of the Lord's name
Narada	- a celestial sage, son of Brahma, the Creator
Navavidha	- Nine forms
Nishkama Karma	- selfless service without caring for the fruits, criticism or blame
Nilayam	- abode
Nivedanam	- offering
Padmasana	- lotus or cross-legged posture while sitting

Paramatma - Primary and most important soul, i.e.,God

Paramahamsa - one who has mastered the art of viveka or discrimination just as the swan can separate out milk from water (hamsa meaning swan)

Paramahansa Yogananda - Founder of the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India (Self-Realization Fellowship)

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa - a great saint of India and Guru of Vivekananda

Param Jyothi - Primary or most important light viz. God

Parvathi - Consort of Lord Shiva, the female aspect of God

Pathram - leaf

Phalam - fruit

Pitha - father

Poorna Avatar - full or complete Avatar

Prabhu - Lord

Prahlad - son of Hiranyakashipu, the evil demon and a great devotee of Lord Vishnu

Prakrithi - nature

Pranam - salutations

Prashant - peace

Prashanthi Nilayam - abode of peace - the abode or ashram of Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Prema	- Love
Pushpam	- flower
Puttaparthi	- a village in Andhra Pradesh, India, where Prashanthi Nilayam, the ashram of Sai Baba, is situated
Raja	- king
Rajas	- qualities of arrogance, ego, conceit
Rama	- Incarnation of Vishnu
Rishis	- saints, holy men
Sadhana	- endeavour, spiritual discipline
Sai Baba	- father, mother and master
Sakha	- friend
Samadhi	- oneness with God. A state of total equanimity and equilibrium
Samsara	- worldly affairs and problems
Sanathana Dharma	- the ancient religion
Sandesh	- message
Sanyasa	- a stage of total renunciation of material and worldly affairs
Sankalpa	- will
Sarva	- all
Saranagathi	- seeking sanctuary at the Lord's Feet

Sathya	- truth
Sathya Sai Baba	- Godman of the present era, deemed by many to be the Kalki Incarnation
Satchithananda	- truth - consciousness - bliss
Satsanga	- the company of good people, sages and holy men
Sathwa	- one of the three Gunas, a nature of peace, calm and equanimity
Seva	- service
Shanthi	- peace
Shantha Bhakthi	- a calm tranquil devotion to God like the relationship between two friends
Shiva	- Hindu God of destruction of evil; one of the Holy Trinity
Shuddhi	- purifying or cleansing
Sthree	- woman
Silver Birch	- a renowned guide of the spirit world
Swami	- Lord, master
Tamil Nadu	- a state in South India
Tantras	- one form of yoga practice
Thathwa	- principle
Thamas	- slothful tendency, one of the three gunas

Thoyam	- water
Thyaga	- renunciation, sacrifice
Tirupathi	- a town in South India, housing a famous temple of Vishnu
Upadesh	- teachings
Upanishads	- holy books of Hindus
Vairagya	- detachment
Vanaprashtha	- a recluse; one of the four ashrama stages
Varna System	- Caste system
Vasanas	- passions
Vatsalya	- motherly love
Vedas	- Holy Scriptures of the Hindus
Vedanta	- Pertaining to the Vedas
Vedic hymns	- manthras and verses from the Vedas
Vibhuthi	- holy ash
Vichara	- enquiry
Vidya	- education
Vishnu	- of the Holy Trinity, He is the aspect of preservation of life
Viveka	- discrimination
Yoga	- union with God

Yogi	- one who is immersed in God
Yuga	- era
Yugavatar	- Godman of the Era

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